

Food Safety Alert – 9/22/06

News on the E. coli outbreak today mainly concerns linking the current crisis to two more deaths, the Industry's and Regulator's admission of the need for stiffer food safety regulations, as well as the FDA considering labeling to allow fresh spinach from other growing regions back on the market...

The *Monterey County Herald* is running an article that Natural Selection has had ongoing sewage problems for human waste of its employees since 1998. In addition, the article states that Natural Selection's wash water waste has also been reported as late as July 2006, to have frequently exceeded permit limits by as much as 3 times the amount permitted. Spokesmen for the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board are revisiting permit conditions in light of the E Coli outbreak. A link to the story here:

<http://www.montereyherald.com/mld/montereyherald/news/local/15581149.htm>

The FDA is working on a way to limit the nation-wide embargo to just spinach grown in the San Benito, Santa Clara, and Monterey counties, by considering labeling bags of spinach with a place of origin to reassure shoppers jittery about eating leafy greens grown in California.

<http://www.topix.net/content/ap/0495033981302124170837234752791681480430>

The Herald also reported from an ag industry press conference held yesterday at the Steinbeck center that members of the Produce Marketing Association and the Western Growers Association are focusing their efforts on monitoring water quality, worker hygiene, and wildlife in the area of the spinach fields as points of contamination for the bacteria. The spokesman (Brian Silberman and Tom Nassif) said that their members make it a habit to place a premium on such food safety practices, but now must exceed national and state protocol. The industry is currently working on stricter food safety guidelines. Here is the story:

<http://www.montereyherald.com/mld/montereyherald/news/local/15581116.htm>

The Californian is reporting new outbreak numbers: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control reported 157 cases of illness due to E. coli infection linked to fresh spinach, including 27 cases of kidney failure, 83 hospitalizations, and one death. In addition, there is new information that some tainted spinach may have been shipped abroad to Canada, Mexico, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Iceland but that no illnesses have been reported from these countries. Also of note is THE CALIFORNIAN IS ALSO OPENLY SOLICITING FIELD WORKERS AND ANYONE WITH INFORMATION ON THE E COLI OUTBREAK TO CONTACT ITS SALINAS OFFICE TO SPEAK WITH A REPORTER.

<http://www.californianonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060922/NEWS01/609220338/1002>

Time Magazine has an article about the E Coli bacteria itself, and that it is spreading more easily than conventionally thought.

<http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1537853,00.html>

The *Christian Science Monitor* is estimating that the nationwide ban on consumption of spinach will cause losses totaling "\$50 million to \$100 million, which includes destroying spinach already on the market, plowing under unharvested fields, and impacts on farmworkers, truckers, restaurants, and grocery stores. Growers from Colorado to Texas to Florida could also be affected, but California - which supplies 75 percent of the US market - will be hit the hardest."

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0922/p02s01-usec.html>

The AP is reporting that the death of an Idaho infant who drank a smoothie with blended spinach and a Maryland woman who had eaten spinach just before becoming ill may be linked to the current outbreak. This story also appears in CNN.com and the San Jose Mercury News.

<http://www.mercurynews.com/mld/mercurynews/15584106.htm>

The *San Jose Mercury News* has also printed a story detailing the different theories on the point of contamination including an analysis of the entire spinach production process, "from field to fork."

<http://www.mercurynews.com/mld/mercurynews/15581258.htm>