

Food Safety Alert – 9/25/06

The weekend has passed and the Spinach embargo is still in effect. The number of illnesses from E Coli bacteria due to the consumption of spinach has risen to 173 in 25 states (Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Utah, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin and Wyoming)

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/09/24/AR2006092400865.html>

It also appears that the FDA is really pushing for a labeling system. They have made statements that “spinach grown anywhere outside that area is safe to eat, but industry needs to figure out how to let consumers know the origin of what they're buying before the green can return to sale,” said Dr. David Acheson of the FDA's Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/09/24/AR2006092400865.html>.

More information on labeling here:

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

The *Californian* is reporting that there has been a second bag of Dole spinach tainted with E Coli 0157:H7 found in the refrigerator of a Utah resident who became ill after eating some of it. (See more on this at CNN.com, <http://www.cnn.com/2006/HEALTH/09/25/tainted.spinach.reut/index.html>). However, the article does explain that there is a fight against time to discover the point of contamination. Usually, there is at least a week between the time the contaminated product is consumed and the time the symptoms of the bacteria become evident. It then takes another two weeks for the strain of E Coli to be determined. Because of this, growers new technology like Radio Frequency Identification (“RFID”) is being tested. RFID “could detect the development of food-borne pathogens, such as E. coli and salmonella, during the time produce spends on the road between the field where it's harvested and the outlet where it's sold or served. RFID electronically monitors all product movement through the supply chain and can be programmed to check temperature and other variables that affect produce spoilage rates. Spreckels-based grower-shipper Tanimura and Antle is participating in pilot projects with Wal-Mart and Albertson's supermarkets to study the benefits of using RFID in the supply chain.”

<http://www.californianonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060925/NEWS01/609250317/1002>

The *Monterey Herald* is reporting that there have not been many layoffs due to the E Coli outbreak. Although Spinach production has decreased to zero, growers, packers, and other agribusinesses are trying to keep workers by reducing hours, and increasing crop diversification. Predictions are that packers and processors will be hit the hardest when the layoffs do come, since their employment depends on orders.

<http://www.montereyherald.com/mld/montereyherald/news/local/15590952.htm>

The *Hollister Freelance* ran an article this weekend about the rush to legislation to address this problem. Local growers and packers are concerned that such legislation would be useless if the point of contamination was unclear. In addition, growers and packers fear that additional regulation, such as requiring farmers to extensively test irrigation water would create a great economic hardship, and would effectively shut down smaller operations.

<http://www.freelancenews.com/news/contentview.asp?c=195457>

*Interesting note: *Time Magazine* is running an article today warning against the consumption of Spinach from: Natural Selection and River Ranch, but makes not mention of the Dole brand, two tainted bags of which have been found in the refrigerators of victims of the 0157:H7 strain.

<http://www.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,1538780,00.html>

