

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

Kira Pascoe, Family Farm Food Safety Coordinator;
530.574.1901-c; kira@caff.org

Naomi Starkman, Straus Communications; 917.539.3924-c;
naomi@strauscom.com



**CALIFORNIA FOOD SAFETY GUIDELINES DO NOT SOLVE *E. COLI*
PROBLEM**

**BIG AGRICULTURE “SOLUTION” COULD HURT FAMILY FARMERS
AND THREATEN ACCESS TO LOCAL LEAFY GREENS**

DAVIS, Calif. (September 5, 2007)—Food safety guidelines proposed by the California produce industry will not protect the public health or solve the state’s *E. coli* problem, and could destroy the state’s internationally-heralded family farm economy.

The industry-sponsored Leafy Green Marketing Agreement (LGMA) guidelines were recently developed in reaction to the tragic 2006 bagged salad *E. coli* 0157:H7 outbreaks, which resulted in more than 350 illnesses and three deaths. The LGMA guidelines are written by and for large growers in the industry, even though these practices were already in place on most large farms that grow for the processed, bagged salad industry. While more than 95 percent of growers are currently encompassed by LGMA, critics have urged refocusing on the most probable source of *E. coli* contamination: processing.

“The industry has done a good job of responding quickly to this problem, but the guidelines are primarily designed for public relations rather than scientifically-based or proven to work,” said Community Alliance with Family Farmers Board President Judith Redmond.

According to CAFF's analysis of data provided by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, since 1999, 80 percent of *E. coli* outbreaks in leafy greens in California, such as spinach, have been traced to processed, bagged salad. The data reveals that 98.5 percent of the actual reported illnesses were traced to fresh-cut, processed leafy greens. Centralized washing and packaging of mixed produce from different farms increases risks of cross-contamination. Pre-cut salads are then placed into sealed plastic bags, which create an ideal environment for bacterial growth.

“The contamination problem is in processed, bagged salad and that’s where the guidelines should focus. The recent Metz bagged spinach recall exemplifies this,” says Kira Pascoe, Family Farm Food Safety Coordinator at CAFF. “All farmers should follow safe practices, but traditional, unprocessed leafy greens should not be in the same category as processed leafy greens or swept up into these inappropriate rules.”

If made mandatory, the LGMA guidelines could freeze out many small and mid-sized family farmers, by imposing costly and scientifically-unproven protocols. The guidelines discriminate against some types of family-scale or biological farming practices that have never been implicated in an outbreak. In California, thousands of family farms grow traditional leafy greens, such as chard, kale and arugula, which has led to growing consumer demand for fresh leafy greens. Mandatory guidelines could cause many small and mid-sized family farmers to abandon a variety of crops due to the high cost of implementing them. Many would have to needlessly change their farming practices, ending traditional family farms as we know them.

CAFF proposes a multi-tiered scientifically-based approach to address food safety, including increased university research on appropriate food safety measures for all sizes of farms and public testing for pathogenic *E. coli* 0157 in the state’s surface water.

“Industrial food companies have an uncanny way of creating problems and then proposing solutions that only industrial food companies are capable of implementing,” said Tom Willey, owner of T&D Willey Farms in Madera, CA. “If family-scale farmers try to swallow the burdens imposed by the industry guidelines, it will doom us.”

###

Community Alliance with Family Farmers (www.caff.org) is a statewide non-profit whose membership includes family farmers and urban residents, working to build a movement of rural and urban people to foster family-scale agriculture that cares for the land, sustains local economies and promotes social justice. Growers Collaborative LLC (www.growerscollaborative.org), is wholly owned by CAFF, and part of CAFF’s Community Food Systems program.