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**Contacts:**

Kira Pascoe, Family Farm Food Safety Coordinator, Community Alliance with Family Farmers;  
530.574.1901

Judith Redmond, Board President, Community Alliance with Family Farmers; 530.796.2214

**Community Alliance with Family Farmers' Responds to Recent "FDA and Fresh Spinach Safety Report" and CDC's Study on Food-Borne Illnesses from Leafy Greens**

The recent "FDA and Fresh Spinach Report" underscores the fact that neither the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) nor the industry-sponsored California Leafy Greens Handler's Marketing Agreement (LGMA) are competently addressing food safety issues or protecting consumers, the Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) said today.

Furthermore, CAFF took issue with comments made by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on Monday regarding their finding that there was a significant increase in the proportion of food-borne illness outbreaks in the U.S. linked to leafy green vegetables from 1973 to 2006, but that the rise can't be completely explained by increased consumption of leafy greens. CAFF suggested that this rise is likely related to the increased proportion of bagged processed greens in people's diets.

The "FDA and Fresh Spinach Safety Report" released last week revealed that FDA is infrequently inspecting high-risk facilities, failing to take vigorous enforcement action when it does inspect and identify violations, and is not inspecting the most probable sources of many outbreaks. CAFF has urged refocusing on the most probable source of *E. coli* contamination: the processing involved in the "fresh cut" bagged salad industry.

"The inspection reports raise serious questions about the ability of FDA to protect the safety of fresh spinach and other fresh produce and illustrates why 'fresh-cut' processed, leafy greens need separate rules from traditional leafy greens: the process they go through increases the food safety risk," said Judith Redmond, CAFF's Board President and partner at Full Belly Farm in Northern California.

In its own study, CDC claimed that the proportion of outbreaks due to leafy greens has increased beyond what can be explained by increased consumption and that contamination can occur anywhere along the chain from the farm to the table. CDC researchers said that efforts by local, state and federal agencies to control leafy green outbreaks should span from the point of harvest to the point of preparation.

However, an analysis by CAFF of data provided by the FDA, shows that since 1999, 80 percent of *E. coli* O157:H7 outbreaks on leafy greens in California have been traced to processed, bagged salad. The data also reveals that 98.5 percent of the reported illnesses were traced to 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 can create an ideal environment for bacterial growth if not kept at the proper temperature at all times from the processing plant to the consumer's plate.

CAFF suggested that CDC's findings could support the contention that increased consumption of "fresh-cut" bagged leafy greens is the probable cause for the increase in leafy green outbreaks. "Increased consumer demand for 'fresh cut' leafy greens has driven the California market to produce and sell more processed, bagged leafy greens," said Redmond. "While all farms should follow basic food safety guidelines, it is possible that additional food safety guidance is needed for the 'fresh cut' industry."

"We are being let down by both government and industry-driven regulation," said Kira Pascoe, Family Farm Food Safety Coordinator at CAFF. "The FDA is lacking in capacity to effectively regulate processing plants which are responsible for increased risk for pathogen outbreaks. And, by focusing on growers, the industry-driven LGMA will not succeed in solving our food safety problems either. We need to reduce the pathogens at their original sources such as contaminated water or dust from nearby industrial cattle operations."

CAFF is calling for research to be conducted into the shelf life for processed, bagged leafy greens to ensure quality and limit the time for possible pathogens to proliferate in the bags. Moreover, CAFF calls for research to be conducted into how pathogens such as *E. coli* O157:H7 can be reduced in the general environment.

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Community Alliance with Family Farmers ([www.caff.org](http://www.caff.org)) is a California 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](http://www.growerscollaborative.org)), is wholly owned by CAFF, and part of CAFF's Community Food Systems program.