



CALIFORNIA FARM BUREAU FEDERATION

EXECUTIVE OFFICES

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**STATEMENT OF THE
CALIFORNIA FARM BUREAU FEDERATION (CFBF)
to the
U.S. HOUSE AGRICULTURE SUBCOMMITTEE
ON HORTICULTURE AND ORGANIC AGRICULTURE
WEDNESDAY, JULY 30, 2008
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

The California Farm Bureau Federation appreciates the opportunity to comment on traceability of fresh produce and the damages caused to the fresh tomato industry by the recent FDA/salmonella actions. The California Farm Bureau is a general farm organization representing 33,000 producers of all California farm commodities.

We recognize and champion food safety, and support any and all steps necessary to ensure safe production of foods and the public's highest trust in its food supply. We are equally determined that our country fosters the best, most-efficient food safety system in the world. We want to make sure that when FDA or any other affected agency makes a decision that they get it right, and that it is done in a timely manner.

Public safety comes first. No question. It is hard to argue against erring on the side of caution. But, we must all realize the gravity of the decisions made and the snowball effect of those decisions. As shown by past food-borne illnesses, media attention and public perception of the dangers posed can have a cataclysmic effect on the food industry. Even after the source has been determined and the illness situation is resolved, the effects can linger long after. Now, a year and one half after the *E. coli* outbreak, California's spinach industry is still feeling the effects of lost sales and poor market prices. Though the fresh market tomato industry has seemingly been absolved of any connection to the recent salmonella illness outbreak, the damages are still accruing.

These incidents raise larger questions. What steps can we take to improve our food monitoring system? To get on top of outbreaks quickly? To provide consumers with prompt and accurate information? And how can we develop a system that clearly defines the target of recalls and narrows unneeded recall actions and the resulting financial losses?

The California Farm Bureau urges the following actions:

- 1.) More and better research on food-borne illnesses and stepped up diagnostic procedures. To accomplish such an outcome, we support more funding and more staffing at the research and diagnostic levels.
- 2.) A level playing field is needed where everyone is dedicated to food safety, not just the grower and shipper. We know that contamination can occur at any point and continues once received at the retail, food service and consumer level. Trace-back alone will not be the end all in food safety.

- 3.) Better reporting procedures and improved communications between food safety agencies and food handlers to handle and trace illnesses in the quickest manner possible.
- 4.) A review of current FDA operating procedures to guarantee the highest level of certainty that product lines subject to recall and consumer alerts are known to have caused the illness before public announcements.
- 5.) Congressional consideration of Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) actions, or other risk management tools to compensate producers for losses they incur through no fault of their own.
- 6.) Encourage improved public education programs for consumers on steps they can take to lessen the likelihood of food-borne illnesses.
- 7.) Improved traceability of product distribution.
- 8.) Enhanced food safety testing and surveillance practices in countries exporting food products to the United States.