

PO Box 4448
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October 14, 2009

Letter of Testimony

Subject: National Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement (Yuma hearing)

From: Jed Murray
Val Verde Vegetable Co., Inc.
Member of Texas Produce Association
Texas Vegetable Associations
Produce Marketing Association
United Fresh Produce Association

Stance: In favor of a NLGMA

Hello, my name is Jed Murray and it is my pleasure to testify on behalf of the Val Verde Vegetable Company Incorporated of McAllen, Texas. Val Verde Vegetable ships seasonal produce grown in South Texas as well as year round produce imported from Mexico. We at Val Verde Vegetable are proud members of the Texas produce Association.

I have worked with Texas produce for the last four years. Prior to working in Texas, I worked for a large grower, packer, and shipper in California. My work in Production Agriculture has taken me from the Salinas, Valley to Yuma, Arizona and parts in between. I have worked with farmers in Mexico from the states of Sonora, Sinaloa, Guanajuato, Coahuila, Puebla, and Tamaulipas. Additionally, I have worked in various areas of Peru sourcing product for the US market place.

I have worked with several different food safety programs including EuroGAP, USDA's QTV program and various other State and National Programs. As I mentioned earlier we are in support of the National Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement. I want to discuss three issues important to the success of this program from the point of view of Val Verde Vegetable and the Texas Produce Association: 1. USDA is in a strong position to administer this program. 2. The goal of the program should be to maximize the number of participants. 3. To be effective the program needs to be accepted by buyers.

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Let me say upfront that we believe in providing safe fresh produce to our customers. We recognize that all groups along the food chain must do all they can to flush out possible points of contamination and that this process is ever evolving.

My first point for strengthening the NLGMA is this. It is very important that growers and shippers have confidence in the agency administering this program. We believe that our industry's long successful working relationship with the USDA puts the USDA in a strong position to administer this agreement. We want to work together with the USDA to develop regional and commodity specific metrics to further improve the food safety chain.

Second, we are deeply concerned about the possibility that with NLGMA begin a voluntary program that some handlers will bear the extra expense of complying with the program while others will choose not to participate. USDA in cooperation with industry groups will need to commit to a strong outreach program to develop support and participation in the program. We understand that if we choose to participate in this program that all of the products handled by Val Verde Vegetable that are defined as Leafy Greens where ever they are produced in the US or Mexico must meet the same standards. We are deeply concerned that our adherence, time, energy, and money complying with the NLGMA will put our firm at a disadvantage with low cost, low standards handler that will choose not to participate in the program. When any firm causes or is suspected of causing a food borne contaminant, every firm marketing product in that category is hurt. This agreement needs to be structured to encourage the largest number of participants as possible so the playing field is level and equal.

Third, the NLGMA needs to have equal stature in the buying community as is currently enjoyed by Primus labs and other third party auditors. NLGMA runs the risk of losing support among handlers if buyers do not recognize and support it. Therefore, we are pleased to see retailer participation in Committee Membership. Their participation in the development of this program is important to gain their support and cooperation.

As a member of the Texas Produce Association we support the development of a National leafy Greens Marketing Agreement. We want to work to continually improve our nation's food supply and we believe the USDA is the government entity best suited to work with our industry. We want the program structured to encourage maximum handler participation thus insuring an equal playing environment. We also believe the NLGMA needs to create metrics and procedures that will give its members equal stature to other certifying bodies.

Thank you for your time and consideration of the items I have discussed today.

Sincerely,

Jed Murray