

Testimony by Adam Lytch
National Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement Hearings
October 22, 2009
Charlotte, NC

Good Morning, thank you for the opportunity to present my testimony today. My name is Adam Lytch. I am the Production & Grower Development Manager of Eastern Vegetables and Melons for L&M Companies, Inc.

Founded in 1964, L&M Companies is headquartered in Raleigh, NC and is the produce marketing and sales arm of the L&M Family of Companies. The L&M Family of Companies consists of other entities including our farming (L&M Farms) and warehouse (Ag Warehouse & Packing) operations. L&M Farms has operations in Georgia & Florida where we grow over 5,000 acres at seven different locations which include mixed vegetables, melons and potatoes. Cabbage is the only core item we grow/pack/ship that would be included under this agreement which represents about 750 acres of our total production.

At L&M, food safety and security are an integral part of our entire operation. Our comprehensive program includes Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) for our farming or other growing and harvesting operations and Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) for our packing and cooling, warehousing, and distribution operations. Our program also includes non-production items such as the internal auditing of these GAP and GMP programs, and employee training programs using customized training materials.

Our industry has come together with a unified proposal, brought forth by many agricultural groups from across the country which has collectively approached the United States Department of Agriculture in favor of creating a National Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement. This agreement will provide a food quality enhancement program that will consist of a framework with uniform, auditable and scientific based metrics, which will still allow for regional variances. This agreement will be applicable across the board for all leafy green producers with the needed regional variances which will recognize the differences in growing conditions across the country.

The proposed National Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement would:

- Provide a vehicle that would enable leafy green handlers to organize and become consistent
- Enhance the overall quality of fresh leafy green vegetable products that are available in the marketplace through the application of good agricultural production and handling practices
- Empower industry representatives to proactively connect with the USDA and FDA to develop the best practices and/or metrics for production and handling practices
- Encourage greater collaboration with Local, State and Federal regulatory agencies
- Improve overall consumer confidence in fresh leafy greens
- And, most importantly this NLGMA would be a means of protecting public health

The members of the NLGMA will be handlers of leafy greens that are fully committed to sell only those leafy greens that are grown, handled and packed under the practices defined in the agreement. The NLGMA will not determine these practices by imposing top-down regulations but rather through an administrative committee whose members will be appointed by the USDA Secretary. All volunteer members of the NLGMA will be subjected to and financially liable for mandatory audits and program verification processes that will mitigate the risk of microbial contamination through processes developed based on the best available scientific methods.

Without this type of nationally orchestrated marketing agreement, our customers (both retail, wholesale and foodservice), third party auditing companies, and different state organizations will continue to develop and implement their own food safety standards for producers and handlers. Many audits are being developed independently and being used as a marketing tool to create competitive advantages, rather than with the needed synergies to ensure a consistent, effective food safety program. I believe by creating the NLGMA, that even with the imposed assessment, growers like us will actually benefit by having to perform fewer audits and having improved consumer confidence in our products.

Under the Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement in California, it is my understanding that some retailers are now accepting the LGMA audit rather than requiring their own preferred audit to be performed. This is great news and would be beneficial for us producers outside of the California and Arizona LGMA area that would benefit from not only a more streamlined process; but also a more consistent and more

scientific based method. The uniformity of such a program would not only benefit the producer, but also the customers/distributors that currently have to deal with a multitude of programs.

The NLGMA includes proponent groups from various industry trade associations including United Fresh Produce Association, Arizona Farm Bureau Federation, California Farm Bureau Federation, California Leafy Green Handler Marketing Agreement, Texas Fresh Vegetable Association, Grower-Shipper Association of Central California, Western Growers, Imperial Valley Vegetable Growers Association, Produce Marketing Association, Georgia Fruit & Vegetable Association and Georgia Farm Bureau.

My testimony today is in support of the National Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement, and I strongly urge other growers, regardless of size, to embrace this agreement as well to insure its success in bringing a consistent and science based set of metrics to our industry. I believe by following this program we will improve consumer confidence in fresh leafy greens and ultimately protect public health.

Thank you for holding this hearing and allowing me the opportunity to share my thoughts in support of the National Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement.