

National Marketing Agreement Regulating Leafy Green Vegetables
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I am Josh Rolph, director of the National Affairs and Research Division for the California Farm Bureau Federation. Our organization represents 85,000 members who grow and raise more than 350 commodities in California. I appreciate the opportunity to express the California Farm Bureau's support for the proposed National Marketing Agreement Regulating Leafy Green Vegetables.

Farmers accept the responsibility to provide safe, quality food. We take that responsibility very seriously. An example of that commitment came three years ago when California's leafy green vegetable growers and shippers faced an unprecedented food safety crisis. Farmers, shippers and handlers immediately developed a plan to improve the quality and safety of California grown leafy greens.

The hallmark of that plan was adoption of the California Leafy Green Products Handler Marketing Agreement that established a system implementing and enforcing effective practices to improve food quality. The agreement created an Advisory Board to review and respond to data, research, and consumer interests. The agreement allows flexibility for continuous improvements to our food safety efforts, while including government oversight of the Board's actions. An essential tool within the agreement allows for rapid adjustments that may be required in order to respond to new science that may show what improvements can be made to assure safe, quality food for the public.

The California Farm Bureau is a proponent of the effort to complement the California agreement's successful track record through the creation of a national marketing agreement administered by USDA. This national agreement will bring the same standards to all companies growing, packaging, or selling leafy greens nationally. Implementation of a national agreement would be a huge leap forward for product safety. With national standards in place, produce buyers would be able to address food safety issues with a consistent and cost-effective plan.

The proposed national agreement's impact on growers would be similar to the California agreement because it would require participating handlers to only purchase from a grower who adheres to the best practices. The California Farm Bureau and Western Growers worked with researchers and regulatory agencies to draft best management practices, which the board of the California agreement reviewed and accepted. These practices focus primarily on farm activities but they also highlight the importance of implementing a program that establishes best practices for all suppliers in the food chain in the growing, processing and distribution of leafy greens. The California Farm Bureau is pleased that the proposed National Marketing Agreement would focus not just on practices on the farm fields but would also look to create good handling practices and good manufacturing practices.

The grower members of our organization have invested significantly in on-farm food quality and safety programs under the California agreement. The proposed national agreement would be able to coordinate with California to prevent any unnecessary additional costs. I believe that involvement in a national program will provide the additional benefit of improving buyer and consumer confidence in California's leafy green vegetables.

In closing, the California Farm Bureau would like to go on record in support of the National Marketing Agreement Regulating Leafy Green Vegetables. If the agreement takes effect, it will bring standardization across the country and will improve all aspects and phases of growing, handling, processing and shipping. All of these improvements will have the result of enhancing consumers' confidence and trust in these nutritious products.