

Robert Boelts

National Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement (No. 970) Testimony

Yuma Public Hearing October 15, 2009

My name is Robert Boelts. I have been involved in the production of leaf greens in the Yuma area for over 18 years. I am a fourth generation farmer with hopes of seeing my sons or daughter continue in the industry. I am the managing member of Nature Fresh Farms LLC with operations in Imperial County in California and Yuma County in Arizona. Our operation produces various types of leafy greens and small grain crops. This season we are growing in excess of 7,500 acres of conventional product and 1,250 acres of certified organically grown product. Nature Fresh Farms LLC is classified as a large grower based on SBA definitions¹. We are strictly a grower of leafy greens and do not harvest or market any product ourselves. All of the shippers and handlers for whom we grow product are signatories on either the CA LGMA or AZ LGMA. Our company employs a full time food safety manager. In addition we have 3 additional employees performing food safety duties during the growing season.

I personally am a board member on the Yuma Fresh Vegetable Association and a member of the Yuma Safe Produce Council. I have been involved in several CA LGMA and AZ LGMA audits and find them to be very thorough and positive. These are the types of audits and controls that are needed on any leafy green product grown anywhere. I am confident that a company having to adhere to any national marketing agreement would feel the same way. These marketing agreements have gone a long way to renew consumer confidence in our products on an area level as well as national sales level. I also believe there to be an even greater need for a Marketing Agreement governing imported leafy greens into our country. Although nearly all of us in the produce industry have had excellent food safety programs for many years, the unfortunate events of September 2006 brought awareness that more could be done. The actions that have been taken over the past three years have been a great step but I believe it needs to be on a national level to make a safer and even playing field. Ensuring the quality and safety of our product as well as the public's well being, health and confidence in our product is of the utmost importance to our industry.

In conclusion, I personally go on record supporting the National Leaf Green Marketing Agreement which I believe will be an excellent tool to support and ensure food safety protocols on a national level. This agreement in my opinion would greatly ensure consumer safety and confidence in the nation's leafy green products.

¹ Handler-small is <\$7 million in cash receipts; Grower <\$750,000