

Leafy Green Vegetables Handled in the United States
Hearing on Proposed Marketing Agreement No. 970
Yuma, Arizona
Yuma Safe Produce Council Testimony
By: Vicki Scott

My name is Vicki Scott and I am a participant in the Yuma Safe Produce Council and the Council's designated spokesperson for this National Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement Hearing. The Yuma Safe Produce Council is a group of food safety coordinators and managers employed by local and regional producers and handlers of leafy greens. We organized in November of 2007 in response to the then, recently formed Arizona Leafy Green Marketing Agreement. The mission of the Yuma Safe Produce Council is to enhance food safety education in our community and among our members by networking, increasing public awareness through media outlets, and maintaining a high understanding of current and ongoing research.

The Yuma Safe Produce Council is neutral on the establishment of a national leafy green marketing agreement. As the designated food safety representatives for our employers, our primary job functions are to develop and execute food safety programs that are specific for our companies, implement food safety directives from our customers, and adhere to prescribed guidance such as the "Commodity Specific Food Safety Guidelines for the Production and Harvest of Lettuce and Leafy Greens"; more commonly referred to as the California and Arizona Leafy Green Metrics. We applaud the recently announced cooperative initiative between USDA and FDA designed to improve outreach efforts with key agriculture and safe food stakeholders to better share and exchange produce best practices and ideas. Protecting the public's health by providing safe, quality produce is our greatest concern.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment today on the subject of research as it appears in the proposed rules, section 970.75 Research and Promotion. The Yuma Safe Produce Council recommends that the research and promotion section be expanded to include production research as allowed under the Agricultural Marketing Agreement Act of 1937 SEC.1 8c.(6) I. The term "food safety research" may provide a clearer intent. Audit metrics under section 970.67 should be developed with the benefit of science-based research. A national based marketing agreement should recognize the great diversity of growing regions and support any metrics development with research that represents the differences in water, environmental factors, and local farming and work practices that exist across the country. We recommend, at a minimum, the following highlighted and underlined language be inserted in section 970.75.

§970.75 Research and promotion.

The Committee, with the approval of the Secretary, may establish or provide for the establishment of food safety research, marketing research and development projects and/or promotional activities, including paid advertising, designed to assist, improve, or promote the efficient adoption, implementation and marketplace acceptance of the agreement and of leafy green vegetables or products handled by signatory members. The expenses of such projects shall be budgeted and paid from funds collected pursuant to §970.56.

Ex. 102

The Yuma Safe Produce Council would also like to comment, in general, on the function of the Zones and more specifically on the eligibility for Zone representation as proposed in section 970.41. The Yuma Safe Produce Council has seen first hand the value of local collaboration and advocacy for food safety. We have increased our knowledge of food safety best practices through our monthly interactions as a group and have outreached to the public with food safety information through local events and the media. The AZ LGMA has fostered a collaborative atmosphere by holding meetings in the public arena and the AZ LGMA Technical Subcommittee has regularly held sessions designed to keep producers and handlers well informed.

It is our opinion that the Zones as currently delineated, do not favor collaborative efforts due to geographic separation and divergent climate and crop production cycles. Although the proposed agreement allows for subcommittee and advisory board creation, it is silent with regards to Zone duties and responsibilities and any potential administration needs. We believe there would be a great advantage in providing for the elected zone committee members to meet and outreach regularly with the membership of the zones they represent. As currently written, this is not a requirement and no funding provisions have been made for this type of interaction. The Yuma Safe Produce Council would be most interested in hearing the intentions of the NLGMA drafters on this topic or discussing a solution with the proponent group, the USDA, and other interested parties.

Furthermore, in order to foster greater cooperation and provide for better representation, we offer the following recommendation with regard to section 970.41 Eligibility. In addition to the language in paragraph (a), we suggest that each producer or handler member of the Committee and their alternate member shall be a legal resident of the Zone for which they are selected. With the inserted language paragraph (a) of the section might read:

§970.41 Eligibility.

(a) Each producer or handler member of the Committee and their alternate member shall be, at the time of his or her selection and throughout his or her term of office, a producer or handler, or an officer or employee of a producer or handler and a legal resident in the zone for which selected.

This concludes my remarks. The Yuma Safe Produce Council would like to express our thanks for your time and kind attention to this testimony.

Respectfully,
Vicki Scott