



GROWER-SHIPPER ASSOCIATION

of Central California
Since 1930

TESTIMONY of JAMES W. BOGART
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Grower-Shipper Association of Central California

Before the Agricultural Marketing Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture
Proposed National Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement
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I am the President and General Counsel of the Grower-Shipper Association of Central California. My association represents more than 300 members who span California's fertile coastal region, encompassing Monterey, Santa Cruz, and San Benito counties. This diversity is reflected in the produce grown ... from vegetables and wine grapes to strawberries and mushrooms, more than 100 different crops flourish in the soil found in this world-renowned coastal agricultural area, including leafy greens.

From small, to large, vertically-integrated farms, the Grower-Shipper Association represents the best-of-the-best in the industry. The association is committed to meet members' needs, providing products and services developed to help their businesses continue to thrive.

My testimony today is in support of the National Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement. The intent of this agreement is the national standardization of requirements and best practices for all phases of the Leafy Greens industry and is an endeavor the Grower-Shipper Association supports whole heartedly.

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I remember the 2006 E. coli outbreak in spinach like it was yesterday and remember thinking it was imperative that the industry take swift action to drastically mitigate the possibility of microbial contamination.

In the fall of 2006, following the announcement that spinach had been contaminated with E. coli and that that spinach probably originated here on the Central Coast of California, the whole world was looking at us. We had a swarm of media here, and I was front and center. Beyond understanding what had gone wrong, the question we all faced was, "What were we going to do next."

It wasn't long before California's Leafy Greens Handler Marketing Agreement was in place and nearly all of my member companies who handle leafy green vegetables were included as signatory members. There was no hesitation from my membership. They recognized the need to take action and they seized the opportunity to implement the most robust food safety system, based on sound science, ever attempted by a specific commodity group.

I have seen, firsthand how effective this agreement has been in California, and I believe, for the betterment of the entire industry and for consumers, this program should be implemented on a national level.

I have been in this industry for almost 30 years, in one capacity or another, and I have never seen a commodity group move so swiftly and so focused on a singular issue. The California LGMA has resulted in a new focus on food safety in which the industry has accepted best practices that are consistent, specific, measurable and verifiable in the field. The metrics therein are sound and thorough, but these proceedings are not about California or Arizona's program; it's about a national agreement that, simply ... makes sense for the industry.

Outbreaks such as the *E. coli* outbreak in September 2006, affect the entire industry, and microbial contamination does not discriminate based on state borders. Anecdotally we have heard stories about how that one outbreak devastated portions of the industry in other states. As a commodity group, we are all in this together. Heaven forbid there is another major outbreak, what happens in California affects Florida; what happens in Ohio affects Arizona. I am not offering that one size fits all. To the contrary ... the proposed agreement provides for regional differences and allows for participation in the process from a broad scope of stakeholders. The reality is, however, food safety is not a regional issue. Food safety is a national issue and should be addressed as such.

Speaking as an industry representative, who lived through the 2006 *E. coli* outbreak right here from the center of the nation's salad bowl, I just don't see any other viable option than to implement a National Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement.

I thank you for your time and I am now available to answer any of your questions.