

**United Fresh Produce Association
Food Safety and Technology Council Meeting
Mayflower Hotel, Washington DC
Wednesday, September 9, 2009**

DRAFT MINUTES

Council Members Present:

Barry Eisenberg (Chair), River Ranch
Walter Ram (Vice Chair), Giumarra
Bassam Annous, USDA ARS
Stan Bailey, bioMerieux, Inc.
Ed Beckman, California Tomato Farmers
Roger Becker, Gold Coast Packing
DeAnn Benesh, 3M
Beth Bland, Georgia Fruit & Vegetable Growers
Jim Bryan (for Hank Giclas), Western Growers
Scott Burnett (for Katie Swanson), Ecolab
Deborah Carter, Northwest Horticultural
Council
Megan Chedwick, Church Brothers
Chris Christian, CA Strawberry Commission
Jim Cranney, California Citrus Quality Council
Paul Cruikshank (for Megan Arnold), C.H.
Robinson
Suresh Decosta, McDonalds
Amy Duda Kinder, A. Duda & Sons
Bob Elliott, Sunkist Growers
Phil Elliott, GMA
Tom Gautreaux, Maxwell Chase Technologies
Scott Grow, G.O. Fresh
John Gurrisi, Darden Restaurants
Valerie Hannig, The Oppenheimer Group
Johnna Hepner, Markon
Yaguang Luo, USDA ARS
Don Mayfield, Cabbage Inc.
Bob Mills, Tanimura & Antle
Gurmail Mudahar, Tanimura & Antle
Gail Murray, Disney Consumer Products
Bill Pool, Wegmans
Gale Prince
Amy B. Smith, DuPont Qualicon
Brian Stepien, Green Giant Fresh
Gregg K Storey, Bayer CropScience
Mary van Ryn, Van Ryn Associates
Bob Whitaker, PMA

Guests:

Adrian Abbott, CPMA
Ron Campbell, MHAIA
Willette Crawford, FDA CFSAN
Robert Epstein, USDA AMS
Anne Fowlie, Canadian Horticultural
Council
Ana Hooper, Darden Restaurants
Bob Hudson, TraceGains
Martha Lamont, USDA AMS MDP
Jennifer McEntire, IFT
Elizabeth Pivonka, PBH
Chuck Plummer, C.H. Robinson
Jane Proctor, CPMA
Susan Reimer Sifford, Darden Restaurants
Steve Roosdahl, The Oppenheimer Group
Marko Zaninovich, Sunview Marketing Int.

United Fresh Staff:

David Gombas

Council Members Absent:

Susan Ajeska, NewStar
Walt Armijo, Lighthouse
Glenn Austin, Monsanto Seminis
Larry Beasley, A. Duda & Sons
John Beaulieu, USDA ARS
Daniel A Botts, Florida Fruit and Vegetable
Jeffrey Brandenburg, The JSB Group
Jim Brennan, Alliance of Technical
Professionals
Gary Campisi, Wal-Mart
Hap Carr, Titan Farms
Larry Cohen, Kraft Foods
Loreena Cook, Condis Foods
Will Daniels, Earthbound Farm
Art Davis, The Sholl Group
Paulette Ann Denault-Bryce, McEntire
Produce
Chris Dzuik, HEB

Lisa Fuentes-Intveld, The Nunes Company
Micah Fuson, Apio, Inc.
Zizi Gibbs, Mann Packing
Jim Gorny, UC Davis PTRIC
Bob Gravani, Cornell University
Albert Green, Six L's Packing Company
Toni Hofer, Raley
Bill Hurst, Univ. Georgia Food Science Dept
Michael Jantschke, Pro*Act
Beverly Kempf, Club Chef
Laure Kenyon, Kenyon Consulting, LLC
Justin Kerr, Sanitation Specialists
Andy Kesler, Jack in the Box
Karan Khurana, Pulse Instruments
Jeanna Kilmer, Silliker
John Kolenski, Kroger
Mahipal Kunduru, Safeway Inc.
Scott Lawson, Syngenta Crop Protection
Frank Lichtner, T-Systems International
Glenn Long, Salyer American Fresh Foods
Tom Mack, Dole Fresh Vegetables
Drew McDonald, Taylor Fresh Foods
Ted McKinney, Dow AgroSciences
Bob Morrissey, National Watermelon
David Mueller, Fresh From Texas

Jerry Noland, Safeway Inc.
Courtney Parker, Fresh Express
Sean Picquelle, Taco Bell
Paulette Pierson, Monsanto Seminis
Joshua Porbeni, Club Chef
Keith Refsnider, Driscolls
Rob Robbins, BSK Laboratories
Victor Robelet, Carlson AirFlo
Merchandising Systems
Michael Roberson, Publix Super Markets
Joan Rosen, Fresh Express
Mansour Samadpour, IEH Labs
Nivia Santiago, Gills Onions
Nancy Shimabukuro, Walter P. Rawls &
Sons
Wilfred Sumner, Scientific Certification
Systems
Jeff Thomas, Target
Steve Tripp, Pacific International Marketing
Kari Valdes, River Ranch
Tony Valenzuela, Naturipe Farms
Thomas Young, Del Monte Fresh Produce
Devon Zagory, NSF Davis Fresh
Brian Zomorodi, Ready Pac Foods

I. Welcome and Introductions

Barry Eisenberg called the meeting to order and asked for self introductions. Eisenberg reminded the Council of the United Fresh antitrust policies, and noted copies were available if desired. The day's agenda and minutes of the June 17-18, 2009 Council meeting were approved without change.

II. Traceability

Dr. Jennifer McEntire, Institute of Food Technologists, briefed the Council on the traceability project "Task Order 6" that FDA had contracted IFT to perform. McEntire reported that the project had concluded and a report would be submitted to FDA by September 15, with public access to the report expected soon after. FDA had specifically asked IFT to identify current and future traceability systems (US and overseas); consider farm to table; points of service back to points of processing and production; accessibility of information to public health officials; and costs of traceability (esp. small business). While the project had originated with a focus on fresh produce traceability, it became an assessment of traceability practices for all FDA-regulated foods. McEntire reported that IFT's approach was to assess what systems and technologies are out there; what is done in other industries; what are other countries requiring; what are food companies doing; what

should food companies be doing; and how much will it cost? The Council was reminded that Council members Gale Prince and Bob Mills had participated on the IFT panel.

Ed Beckman briefed the Council on another FDA-contracted IFT project, originated by the Harvard School of Business and performed in collaboration with Microsoft, another software company, FDA and several fresh produce stakeholder organizations. The objective of the project was to demonstrate that, in the event of a multistate investigation, the affected produce industry would be able to assemble existing business transaction records, and software would be able to extract and compile the necessary data from the records, in a manner that would allow FDA to quickly determine which produce companies are and are not involved in the investigation. Using the tomato supply chain as an example, industry leaders had succeeded in gathering large amounts of data from the tomato supply chain, bring the data into alignment using off-the-shelf spreadsheet software and apply advanced visualization technologies to illuminate the flow of produce down to the lot level, even when repacked. Further, these data and visualizations appeared to be of a kind which could assist government to rapidly test its investigative hypotheses, perhaps clearing many implicated companies quickly without waiting for the full traceback to complete, and permitting government to concentrate resources on the non-excludable companies. The next step was a pilot project to further prove this approach to collecting and evaluating industry data for government use during an investigation. Beckman reported that the group had scheduled a briefing for FDA top management September 15.

III. USDA Microbiology Database Program

Dr. Robert Epstein, Deputy Administrator, Science and Technology, USDA AMS, briefed the Council on recent activities of the USDA MDP. According to Epstein, the goals of MDP are to collect data on microbial presence in selected food crops, minimize economic impact on industry by providing early alerts when foods are contaminated with pathogenic organisms, and to support CDC's efforts to prevent illness. MDP samples are collected at wholesale or large retail distribution centers and terminal markets. Commodities to be sampled are selected in consultation with CDC and FDA, and generally focus on produce that have been implicated in outbreaks. Approximately 11,000 samples are collected and tested per year. Epstein reported the following commodities were tested in 2009: alfalfa sprouts, green onions, hot peppers, Romaine and organic lettuce, peanut butter, spinach, round and roma tomatoes, cantaloupe and cilantro. Samples were tested for *Salmonella*, *E. coli* O157:H7 and non-O157:H7 pathogenic *E. coli*. MDP laboratories reported 14 produce samples tested positive (all *Salmonella*) between January and August 2009, including sprouts (5), roma tomato (1), spinach (1), Anaheim pepper (1), Romaine lettuce (1), green onion (4) and jalapeno pepper (1). While the MDP collected blinded samples, without source information, when the program originated in the 1990's, they have recently begun collecting all identifying information available, and now make that information available to FDA or state health agencies for regulatory follow-up. Epstein reported this change was a condition of their continued funding by Congress.

IV. USDA Funded Produce Research

Dr. Thomas Bewick, National Program Leader, USDA Cooperative State Research Education and Extension Service, briefed the Council on the Specialty Crop Research Initiative grants program. He noted that the proposal review process includes volunteer reviewers who are selected based on the types of applications that are submitted. All are considered experts in their fields. SCRI aims for around 30% of the panelists to represent farmers and other industry stakeholders, and about 30% reviewers from the previous year. He noted that they frequently have difficulty identifying enough industry representatives. For FY08, the first year of the SCRI program, 230 proposals were submitted for funding, with a cumulative request for over \$266M. Of these, reviewers ranked 48 proposals at a High priority or Outstanding for funding, for a combined award of \$72M; as the program had less than \$50M available, not even all of these were funded. Bewick reported that the 2009 SCRI Request for Application was published in January, with applications required to be submitted by April. Review panels were held in June. 228 proposals were received, and USDA anticipates funding about 28 proposals a total of \$47.3 million. Because all had not yet been awarded, Bewick was unable to share the names and projects of the 2009 recipients. Gombas encouraged Council members to volunteer to serve as reviewers, in support of an industry perspective in the selection of projects for funding.

V. FDA Reportable Food Registry

Dr. Willette Crawford, a previous Council member and now with FDA CFSAN Division of Produce Safety, briefed the Council on the newly established Reportable Food Registry. She noted that the RFR was mandated by Section 1005 of the FDA Amendments Act of 2007, and most of its structure was established in the Act. According to the Act, FDA must establish an electronic portal through which “responsible parties” shall report ingredients, foods or feed that may cause serious adverse health effects or death to humans or animals. Responsible parties must report as soon as practical, but no later than 24 hours after they determine that an article of food is a reportable food. Failure to report is considered a felony. The portal, and the regulation mandating compliance, went into effect the day before: September 8, 2009. Crawford explained that “responsible parties” include all facilities that are required by the Bioterrorism Act to register with FDA. This includes commercial packinghouses, repackers, distributors and processors, but does not include farms.

VI. Garment Guidelines

Kari Valdes reported that the *Best Practices for Garment Use in Fresh-cut Produce Plants* had been revised according to reviewers’ comments and was ready for Council final approval, followed by posting on the United Fresh website. The Council approved the document.

VII. Microbiology White Paper

Bob Mills reported that the Microbiology White Paper had been revised and was now ready for outside review. Mills noted that the title had been changed to *Considerations in Developing and Using Microbiological Sampling and Testing Procedures if used as a Part of a Food Safety Program for Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Products*, to avoid

misunderstanding the scope of the paper. He also noted that the paper does not advocate for testing, only describes considerations if testing is desired; for example, an operation should first assess the need to test, then identify the objectives of the testing program, and then develop the program to specifically meet those objectives. The paper also notes that, when developing a testing program, an operation must be prepared to take “action” when the testing program reveals an out-of-compliance situation. Gombas noted that members of the International Commission on Microbiological Specifications for Foods (ICMSF) will be asked to review the paper prior to publication.

VIII. Audits Benchmarking Matrix

The objective of this Council project is to enable a comparison of frequently used fresh produce audit programs on the basis of how the programs are managed and their internal quality programs, separate from the audit standards being used. Gail Murray reported progress on this matrix, which was the next step after the Global Conference on Produce Food Safety Standards in Las Vegas. A matrix structure was developed to facilitate comparisons between the various programs. The matrix is divided into three sheets: Pre-farm gate, which includes seven GAP programs; Post-farm gate, which includes seven GMP audit programs; and Standard Owners, which includes the SQF, GlobalGAP, BRC and IFS programs. The program owners provided text for each of the matrix questions, which included topics such as “Do you issue certificates and what do they mean?” and “How are auditors trained to assess hazards and risk of potential food safety issues?” Murray reported that a final draft was being reviewed by the participating audit organizations, and would ultimately be posted on the United Fresh website for easy reference and review. The matrix should enable audit customers to compare the organizations for audit program qualities that are “right” for them.

IX. Tomato, Green Onion Metrics

Ed Beckman briefed the Council on the Tomato Metrics Initiative. The objective of the initiative was to develop harmonized food safety audit standards for the North America tomato supply chain that would be acceptable to buyers and suppliers alike. He reported that the participants had successfully completed versions of four audit protocols: Open Field, Harvesting and Field Packing; Greenhouse; Packinghouse; and Repacking and Distribution. Along with the audit protocols, the participants had developed companion checklists for each. The next step was to publish the documents on the United Fresh website, followed by a general outreach on their availability. The intent was also to begin using the standards in 2010, which would require an auditor training course to be developed. The goal will be to achieve consistency and calibration between audit groups and auditors in the use and interpretation of the Metrics through uniform training.

Gombas reported that Western Growers had received a grant to develop Commodity Specific Food Safety Guidelines for the Green Onion Supply Chain. A group of volunteers were meeting weekly by teleconference to draft the guidelines. The group began with the Leafy Greens Best Practices, and was modifying the contents to be applicable to green onions production, harvest and post-harvest handling. Council members were directed to Hank Giclas for further information.

X. Standards Harmonization

Suresh DeCosta reported that the Standards Harmonization project had advanced to scheduling a meeting of produce supply chain business leaders on September 22 in Atlanta. Over 30 business leaders had been invited to discuss whether they would accept a “harmonized” set of GAP food safety standards, if developed by a particular process and a particular group of technical experts, and to define what that process and group would need to be. If there is general “buy-in”, the output from this “steering committee” meeting will then be used to direct a separate Technical Working Group to develop the harmonized standard.

XI. Publicizing FS&T Activities outside of United Fresh

Walter Ram reported on United Fresh’s intent to create three new web pages for each of the Boards and Councils: an all-access page, a members-only page, and a “chat” page. The web pages are intended to be a source of information for the public and internally for Council members. These pages will serve as the Council’s “face” to the public. For example, the public page can include Council minutes and reports from the Working Groups. United Fresh and the Council will need “do’s and don’ts” for use of the pages, since misinterpretation of the available information is a real concern. However, these pages give the Council and the produce industry the opportunity for a “one stop shop” for produce safety and technology information. The pages will have to be a dynamic system, where outdated information is removed and new information easily added. The pages may also include information or links to information for consumers, such as “how to properly wash produce”. Some of the suggested topics for the pages included “News you can use”, “Who we are” (FS&T Council), a Mission Statement for the Council, “Hot Topics” for very new information, “Frequently Asked Questions” and an opportunity for Q&A from visitors to the web pages.

XII. New Working Groups

Eisenberg led a discussion on a creation of new working groups. While the Microbiology and Standards Harmonization Working Groups still have significant work to do, the Audits Benchmarking WG is nearing completion of its objectives, and the Research and Education WGs have never really taken off. Several members expressed continued support for the Education WG, noting that United Fresh needs to communicate and market its educational tools, particularly to the smallest operations. Bland shared that education and outreach has a huge market in Georgia, provided it can be offered at a “small price”. There was also discussion about established a Communication WG, to identify opportunities to communicate/market the Council’s efforts to the greater produce industry. Expertise to do this would likely have to come from outside the Council. Prince suggested the Council establish a working group on Processing Equipment Assessment.

XIII. What Have You Heard?

Some of the items offered by Council members included:

- New technology for water acidification using carbon dioxide.
- Reports that more customer companies are holding food safety education seminars.
- The AOAC proposal, to develop standardized and validated microbiological sampling and testing procedures for fresh produce, was not funded by USDA. They will revise the proposal and resubmit in January. If funded, this project will be performed in collaboration with the Microbiology WG.
- Standards and test requests for non-O157:H7 shiga-toxin producing *E. coli* (non-O157:H7 STEC) are becoming more frequent. However, test methods for *E. coli* O157:H7 are not all effective for these strains, and not all non-O157:H7 STEC have been demonstrated to be human pathogens. It was suggested that the Council develop a white paper/fact sheet on non-O157:H7 STEC for the produce industry, perhaps building on similar tools developed by Grocery Manufacturers Association.

XIV. Next Meeting

Gombas noted that the next regularly scheduled meeting of the Council would be at the United Fresh Winter Leadership Meeting, January 19th, at the JW Marriott Desert Springs Resort & Spa in Palm Desert, California. A schedule of the week's events is available on the United Fresh website at www.unitedfresh.org/winter_leadership_meetings.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.