

November 22, 2018

TO: Dr. Stephen Ostroff, Dr. Stic Harris, CDR Kari Irvin, Dr. Jim Gorny
U.S. Food and Drug Administration

Dr. Ian Williams, Dr. Matt Wise
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

We are writing to you on behalf of the organizations below and our thousands of members throughout the fresh produce supply chain from grower through retail and restaurants.

Given the broad public advisory issued by FDA and CDC on Wednesday November 20, our organizations have mobilized to do all we can to help protect public health and quickly narrow the potential of contaminated romaine lettuce in the marketplace. We have taken the following steps:

- Our organizations immediately supported FDA and CDC's call to remove all romaine lettuce in the marketplace. We advised our members of this strong recommendation and continue to encourage product removal. We believe this process has been largely effective in removing product from the marketplace.
- We have urged our members to suspend deliveries and shipping of all romaine lettuce until FDA can feel confident that product being shipped is unrelated to the outbreak.
- We have convened groups of technical and business experts to examine every possible clue in narrowing the source of this outbreak, from growing regions shipping within the outbreak timeline, to sales channels into the geographically concentrated states in the upper Midwest, northeast and eastern Canada.
- We are using all data possible to ensure that future supply of romaine lettuce comes from areas that could not have been linked to this outbreak, and ensuring that production processes, harvesting, cooling and packing of that product is with verifiably sanitized equipment and facilities.

Consumers have suffered significant financial burden in throwing away safe product in compliance with this directive, as well as suffering a blow in confidence about a healthy food product. Concurrently, produce growers, shippers, wholesalers, retailers and restaurateurs who are not involved in the outbreak have suffered significant damages, when only an extremely small part of the romaine supply may have been contaminated, with no illnesses at all reported in 39 states. We are extremely anxious to satisfy FDA's concerns about the supply of romaine and return safe product to our millions of consumers. To that end, we ask for your help in the following ways:

- It is critical that industry understand the point of sale reported for verified illnesses so that we can use our business process sales channels to narrow the scope of potentially affected product. Given FDA's newly announced policy to list retail sales establishments that may have received affected product in recalls, we believe it is appropriate to share the point of sale establishments linked to illnesses. We do not need access to private records in order to be helpful using our knowledge of supplier/customer relationships to protect public health.
- We ask that FDA formally review data that we will submit demonstrating that romaine lettuce coming from certain growing regions could not possibly have been linked to this outbreak. We believe that industry supply chains have a responsibility to ensure the safety of products we offer to the public, and not count on consumers reading labels with markings such as city, county or state of origin in order to make their own determination of safety. Once FDA is satisfied that romaine lettuce in the marketplace and supply chain at the time of the consumer

advisory has been removed, we ask the agency to withdraw its broad warning not to consume any romaine and instead communicate that product coming back on the market is not related to the outbreak.

- If, on an interim basis, FDA would be more comfortable with product being clearly marked to indicate a “cleared” growing region or some language that FDA approves, our members would consider this step in order to begin moving the thousands of truckloads of produce soon to be maturing in the fields.
- We ask FDA to review the data on illnesses and determine that baby romaine leaves have not been implicated in illnesses, and thus advise industry of the acceptability of this unique product to be used in salad blends.
- Finally, we will send under separate cover an outline of questions we believe FDA and state authorities doing traceback should ask of all companies involved. Again, this is in the interest of quickly narrowing potential sources.

We thank you for your timely consideration of these requests. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Arizona Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement
California Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement
Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association
Grower-Shipper Association of Central California
Produce Marketing Association
United Fresh Produce Association
Western Growers
Yuma Fresh Vegetable Association
Yuma Safe Produce Council