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Contacts:
Mary Coppola  
United Fresh Produce Association  
cmpolla@unitedfresh.org  
202-303-3425

Cassidy Taylor  
Produce Marketing Association  
ctaylor@pma.com  
302-781-5852

Byline:
Cathy Burns, CEO, Produce Marketing Association and  
Tom Stenzel, President & CEO, United Fresh Produce Association

After the immediate crisis of last November’s outbreak related to romaine lettuce, our associations moved quickly to bring together a diverse, progressive group of stakeholders to help tackle the myriad of complex issues. More than 100 individuals joined our Romaine Task Force, including industry leaders across the supply chain, expert consultants, state and federal government officials, partner associations, academic scientists and consumer groups.

For nine months, these volunteers have worked to analyze risks and recommend prevention steps, examine weak points in supply chain traceability and offer solutions, and determine ways for industry and government to work together more effectively when outbreaks do occur.

With this week’s release of the Task Force Report, we share with the industry and all concerned powerful recommendations that we believe can help protect public health and reduce the impact of outbreaks on our industry if and when they do occur. You can read the full Task Force Report on our either of our websites – www.pma.com and www.unitedfresh.org.

Preventing outbreaks must remain our top priority. We’ve supported the California Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement when its Board took the monumental step of determining that surface water should be assumed to be contaminated and in need of treatment if overhead application occurs within 21 days of harvesting leafy greens. And while ag water was our initial focus related to this outbreak, we are now convening a deeper subset of experts to evaluate the risks of concentrated animal feeding operations and recommend preventive strategies for potential environmental contamination from beyond our farms.

Number two following prevention has got to be achieving full-chain traceability for our products. We know this is hard, and takes the cooperation and investment of every sector of our industry from grower to retailer and restaurant. But we simply have to get there – if not, we put additional consumers at risk with long and drawn out investigations and cost our industry hundreds of millions of dollars in ancillary damages when a targeted recall is all that’s needed.
Last, there are so many ways collaboration and communication between industry and government can be improved. We’re pleased to say that collaboration is getting better already, but we need to address the systemic barriers between regulatory agencies and industry in order to narrow outbreaks as quickly as possible and prevent overly broad “do not eat” advisories. Industry and government also have the responsibility to conduct investigations when an issue occurs and determine the root cause of how a product became contaminated. Moving from one outbreak to the next without deeply understanding what went wrong is a failing strategy, and one our industry can no longer afford.

There is one issue we’re able to put behind us – that’s consumer labeling on romaine packaging. In order to quickly return romaine to the market after last fall’s outbreak, industry and government agreed to label all romaine with its harvest date and location. The task force did a great job in developing consistent regional names and that FDA will now use. And, FDA has indicated that we no longer need harvest date labeling if that can be discerned through use by dates or other information. Yet, we still know that package labeling is no answer for real traceability. We have to know what product was sold at what location, long after the packaging has been discarded.

So on to implementation of these powerful recommendations! Our associations are convening a new Joint Committee on Leafy Greens comprised of industry leaders at each point in the supply chain who have the motivation and will to lead by example, enacting change in their own operation and serving as role models to others.

PMA and United Fresh will be co-hosting a webinar in November to further present and discuss these recommendations. You could say that this is the “end of the beginning,” and PMA and United Fresh are committed to seeing this effort through to completion.

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**About United Fresh Produce Association**

Founded in 1904, the United Fresh Produce Association brings together companies across every segment of the fresh produce supply chain, including growers, shippers, fresh cut processors, wholesalers, distributors, retailers, foodservice operators, industry suppliers and allied associations. We empower industry leaders to shape sound government policy. We deliver the resources and expertise companies need to succeed in managing complex business and technical issues. We provide the training and development individuals need to advance their careers in produce. Through these endeavors, we unite our industry with a common purpose – to build long-term value for our members and grow produce consumption. For more information, visit [www.unitedfresh.org](http://www.unitedfresh.org).

**About Produce Marketing Association**

Produce Marketing Association (PMA) is the leading trade association representing companies from every segment of the global produce and floral supply chain. PMA helps members grow by providing connections that expand business opportunities and increase sales and consumption. For more information, visit [www.pma.com](http://www.pma.com).