

Senator Offers Reforms to Ensure Safety of Leafy Greens

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SACRAMENTO, Calif., Jan. 31 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- In response to a series of deadly E. coli outbreaks linked to California-grown leafy greens, which shook consumer confidence, Senator Dean Florez will introduce the California Produce Safety Action Plan on Thursday in Sacramento. The plan includes three measures which address food supply vulnerabilities, from water used to irrigate crops to the process for tracing the source of an outbreak.

"While these outbreaks may have dealt a temporary blow to consumer confidence, we have an opportunity here to take what we have learned from the experience and create a food safety system that is second to none, just like California produce," Florez said.

The first measure Florez will introduce gives the Department of Health Services (DHS) the authority it needs to effectively manage future outbreaks, such as allowing DHS to recall, quarantine or destroy tainted produce. Under the measure, growers of leafy greens would be required to get a license through DHS, just like processors do, and identify risk factors at their growing locations, such as proximity to wildlife that could track E. coli into crops. The bill also creates an inspection program, funded by licensing fees, which will send inspectors to farms to conduct testing of water, soil and produce.

The second bill calls on DHS to establish "good agricultural practices" which growers of leafy greens must follow, governing everything from water and fertilizer use to issues of sanitation and flooding. The bill prohibits the use of creek water for irrigation or raw manure for fertilizer and requires that water used for growing leafy greens be tested every two weeks during the growing season and immediately prior to harvest. Growers must maintain records of these practices, which must be reviewed prior to transporting the leafy greens.

The third measure requires DHS to establish requirements for a traceback system, which will allow the speedy tracking of leafy greens from farm to retailer. An expedited traceback system would allow DHS to quickly trace contaminated greens to their precise source, preventing a repeat of September when all spinach was suspect and all growers took the hit because consumers did not know which produce they could trust.

WHEN: Thursday, February 1, 2007; 10:00 a.m. WHERE: Governor's Press Room; CA State Capitol, Room 1190 CONTACT: Jennifer Hanson, +1-916-651-4016

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