

Subject: florez news release

For Immediate Release
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California Senator moves to secure food supply

Florez announces measure to eliminate dangerous loopholes exposed by e-coli crisis

FRESNO –Senator Dean Florez, D-Shafter, is calling on the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) to waste no time in addressing vulnerabilities to the state's food supply exposed by the ongoing e-coli crisis linked to California spinach, so that the public can be assured of the continued safety and quality of our agricultural products.

Florez will address the issue at a news conference Tuesday morning in Fresno.

In the last three weeks, one person has been killed and more than 100 people in 19 states sickened by fresh bagged spinach tainted by e-coli, a bacterium which causes diarrhea and abdominal cramping and can lead to sever kidney damage or even death in vulnerable individuals such as the elderly and very young children. The source of the outbreak has been linked to a California company, but not yet to an individual farm. The contamination may have occurred in the field or during processing.

While the company's organic spinach has now been cleared as the culprit in this outbreak, there was early speculation that water used to irrigate the organic spinach may not have been of the highest quality. That suggestion exposed the fact that a 2003 law governing the quality of organic products does not prohibit the use of reclaimed or municipal water in their irrigation. Florez intends to introduce legislation to close this dangerous loophole.

Another school of thought is that the spinach may have been packaged in bags which were not stored under sanitary conditions, or which were stored in warm or humid conditions which allowed a small quantity of e-coli to grow rapidly. Bag storage, sanitary conditions in the fields and hygiene habits of workers, along with access to proper restrooms and hand-sanitizing stations will all be issues considered by Florez as he develops legislation to create a California Produce Safety Action Plan.

Florez recognizes that the key to the success of these changes will be to increase the authority of CDFA inspectors, increase their presence in the fields and packing houses of crops which are grown in the ground, and train those inspectors specifically for e-coli prevention. He will also look into ways the public can be notified more quickly and efficiently about life-threatening outbreaks.

"If we don't use this opportunity to change and to institute best practices, why should anyone buy California spinach again? This has been a terrible ordeal for agriculture in California and for concerned consumers, but ultimately we can use these lessons learned to develop an inspection system second to none and reassure the public that California produce equals top quality."

Tuesday's news conference will be held at 10 a.m. in the Fresno District Office of Senator Florez, located at 2550 Mariposa Mall, Suite 2016.

***** MEDIA ADVISORY *** MEDIA ADVISORY *** MEDIA ADVISORY *****

WHO: Senator Dean Florez, D-Shafter

WHAT: News conference on state response to e-coli crisis

**WHEN: Tuesday, September 19, 2006
10:00 a.m.**

**WHERE: Fresno District Office of Senator Dean Florez
2550 Mariposa Mall, Suite 2016**