



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
Friday, July 9 2021

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California LGMA Votes to Mandate Risk-Based Pre-Harvest Testing

Salinas, CA—The California Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement (LGMA) Board voted this week to mandate pre-harvest testing for leafy greens grown in fields where elevated risk factors are present. Specifically, the LGMA food safety program will now require members to assess each of their fields to determine if certain risks such as proximity to animal operations exist. For fields that meet these criteria, LGMA members will be required to collect product samples and test them to determine if pathogens are present.

With this action, several steps are now set in motion to make risk-based pre-harvest testing officially part of the LGMA's government audits. Updates are now being finalized to the LGMA Food Safety Practices, or metrics. The updates will also include the requirement that growers perform what's called a 'root cause analysis' if any test comes back positive for E. coli or salmonella.

Working in conjunction with food safety researcher Dr. Trevor Suslow and Western Growers, expanded pre-harvest product sampling and testing protocols are currently being finalized to provide the industry with a standardized methodology. The new protocols for fields with elevated risk call for collecting 60 samples totaling a minimum of 1500 grams per acre. Testing must be done 4 to 7 days prior to harvest.

"The Board's decision was an important step in advancing the safety of lettuce and leafy greens," said Tim York, CEO of the LGMA. "New testing protocols are predicted to provide a 95 percent chance of finding a pathogen in the field, even if only 1 percent of the crop is contaminated."

"These new testing protocols coupled with a concerted effort to gather information on how the field was contaminated will help us find solutions to prevent future outbreaks," York continued.

"This was absolutely the right thing for the LGMA and for consumers," said John D'Arrigo of D'Arrigo Brothers, a grower-packer-shipper and member of the LGMA Board. "This action addresses demands of government agencies and our retail and foodservice customers who are looking for us to provide additional safety assurances that protect the public. That is exactly what this pre-harvest testing requirement will do."



York explained that once the LGMA Board adopts the new food safety requirements and finalizes testing protocols, which is expected in August, members will officially be required to comply. LGMA government audits will begin verifying these practices in December.

“We encourage our members to begin familiarizing themselves with requirements to assess risk factors and the proposed testing methodology,” said York, noting the information can be found on the LGMA’s website [here](#) and [here](#).

“The LGMA Board understands the rapid development of these new requirements comes with a burden on individual companies to implement the changes,” said York. “We will be offering numerous resources and training to assist members in adopting these practices on their farms. We thank all our members for their continued commitment to improving the safety of lettuce and leafy greens.”

About California LGMA: The California LGMA is a food safety program that brings farmers together to make lettuce and leafy greens safer. LGMA members produce over 70% of the Nation’s lettuce and leafy greens - adding up to over 30 billion servings a year. In an effort to provide consumers with safe leafy greens, the California LGMA verifies food safety practices, enforces through government audits and requires a commitment to continuous improvement. Learn more at www.lgma.ca.gov

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