



Ten Things Being Done to Make Leafy Greens Safer This Fall

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Sacramento, CA -- In a year of unparalleled tragedies stemming from the pandemic to California wildfires, lettuce farmers in California and Arizona are taking action to prevent foodborne illness outbreaks.

“As we approach the Fall transition when patterns have emerged in recent years, everyone is taking additional precautions to prevent potential problems,” said Scott Horsfall, CEO of the California Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement (LGMA), a stringent food safety program that verifies science-based food safety practices are being followed on leafy greens farms.

“This year has been challenging enough for everyone including consumers, farmers and farmworkers,” said Dan Sutton, a grower of leafy greens in San Luis Obispo, California and chairman of the LGMA food safety program. “As farmers, we’re doing everything possible to make sure our crops are farmed safely and we’re working together with government, food safety experts and the produce industry to keep people safe.”

The LGMA announced today several activities implemented since an outbreak of E. coli associated with romaine lettuce occurred last November.

“The LGMA has issued an action list of ten things being done to keep leafy greens safe. These activities are designed to improve leafy greens safety now and into the future,” said Horsfall, who noted that the LGMA is the most stringent food safety program in the produce industry. “In many areas, the LGMA program goes well beyond what’s required of other produce crops under federal laws.

“For example, the LGMA is the only program that requires its farmers to perform mandatory water testing and have traceback systems in place to track product back to the farm and forward to the first customer who receives it,” he said. “On top of that, we’ve strengthened our existing standards even further in the aftermath of recent outbreaks.”

Horsfall explained the ten items on its action list include things like:

- A heavying-up of government audits conducted on leafy greens farms over the next three months;
- Stringent enforcement of sweeping new water standards for all LGMA member companies;
- An ongoing pilot program to improve the supply chain's ability to assist government investigators in tracing lettuce from consumers back to the farm where it was grown;
- Enhanced testing of farming inputs like compost to monitor for pathogens.

“More improvements are coming in the near future,” added Horsfall. “Most importantly, we are looking closely at the LGMA’s required food safety practices for the proximity of animals to leafy greens farms in light of findings from FDA investigations into past outbreaks. We have already increased buffer zones required between animal operations and our farms. Additional changes are being considered now.”

“All of this is being done to ensure consumers are protected,” emphasized Sutton. “Now more than ever, it’s our responsibility to prevent leafy greens products from becoming the source of foodborne illness. We owe this to the millions of families, including our own, who eat the healthy foods we grow.”

A list of all ten action items is below.

Note: The LGMA held a webinar September 1 to provide additional detail and presentations from industry and government representatives including; Scott Horsfall, CEO California LGMA; Dan Sutton, Chairman California LGMA; Teresa Lopez, Arizona LGMA Administrator; Greg Komar, California LGMA Technical Director; Sonia Salas, Western Growers Assistant Vice President Food Safety, Science & Technology; Natalie Krout-Greenberg, California Department of Food and Agriculture Inspection Services Director; and Jennifer McEntire, United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Association Senior Vice President Food Safety & Technology.

You can view a recording of the webinar [here](#).

All of this information is available on the LGMA website: <https://lgma.ca.gov/news/10-things>

ACTION LIST:
TEN THINGS BEING DONE TO MAKE LEAFY GREENS SAFER THIS FALL

- 1. LGMA food safety audits are ongoing during COVID-19.**
Mandatory on-farm audits of all LGMA members by government officials have continued during the pandemic. Members have a remote option for document review and verification.
- 2. The California LGMA is “heavying up” audits during the season transition.**
The California Department of Food and Agriculture is bringing in additional personnel to ensure that every LGMA member is audited at least once between now and November.
- 3. LGMA requires 100% compliance.**
As always, the LGMA requires its members to be in compliance with all 300+ food safety checkpoints that make up every on-farm audit conducted through the LGMA program.
- 4. 2019 irrigation water standards are being implemented and enforced.**
LGMA members are following new, more stringent standards approved in 2019 and these are being verified by government auditors. Farms must now comply with 92 different food safety checkpoints that deal exclusively with ensuring the safety of water used to grow leafy greens.
- 5. New food safety updates approved by LGMA Board in August 2020.**
The LGMA recently approved several more changes to its required food safety practices in the areas of farm water use and field/equipment sanitation. These will become part of audits in the near future. Education and training on how to comply with these new requirements is underway now. Additional updates to other areas of the LGMA’s required food safety practices will be announced soon.
- 6. State agencies are monitoring compost used on leafy greens farms.**
The California Department of Food and Agriculture and sister state agencies are conducting a surveillance project to monitor compost used to grow leafy greens.
- 7. Government inspectors are working to ensure leafy greens farms are in compliance with the Produce Safety Rule.**
Leafy greens farms in California and Arizona are being visited by additional state government inspectors acting in conjunction with FDA to ensure they are following all regulations under the Produce Safety Rule.
- 8. New research projects are underway to learn more about potential risks involved in farming leafy greens.**

It's clear that we need to know more. Several new projects are being conducted by government, industry and academia with the goal of better informing the required food safety practices implemented under the LGMA.

9. The LGMA verifies with every audit that a traceability system is in place at all member companies.

A recent survey of LGMA members shows 100% of LGMA members companies are tracking information that could assist government outbreak investigations.

10. The LGMA supports a Leafy Greens Traceability Pilot to improve traceback through the supply chain.

A coalition of food industry groups that includes the United Fresh Produce Association and the Produce Marketing Association is conducting a project aimed at improving the speed and efficiency of tracing product during an outbreak investigation.

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