



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 29, 2020

contact: April Ward
april@lgma.ca.gov

Data Shows Lettuce Farmers are Complying with New Water Requirements

Sacramento, CA. -- Last year the Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement approved significant changes to improve the safety of water used in farming leafy greens. These updates are now in place throughout the California leafy greens industry and represent a further strengthening of what were already the most stringent measures required of any produce commodity. These requirements also go well beyond what's currently in place under federal Produce Safety Rule regulations for other produce items.

"Media reports often incorrectly state that leafy greens farmers are not required to test their water. Nothing could be further from the truth," says Scott Horsfall, CEO of the California Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement (LGMA), a comprehensive food safety program that verifies science-based food safety practices are being followed on leafy greens farms.

The LGMA has released new information about food safety practices concerning water used to farm leafy greens. Specifically, data shows that since April, when new water standards were added to the LGMA audit checklist, government auditors have conducted 69 audits of LGMA members to verify compliance with the 92 food safety checkpoints for water included in each audit.

"Of the 6,348 total water checkpoints reviewed by auditors, LGMA members were collectively found to be out of compliance with 64 checkpoints," he explains. "This shows farmers are fully compliant 99 percent of the time and indicates LGMA members are doing a very good job of implementing these new metrics in their operations."

Horsfall emphasized that LGMA members are required to correct all citations for non-compliance. Of the 64 citations issued for non-compliance with water metrics, 25 were very minor and could be corrected during the audit. The remaining 39 required a Corrective Action Plan be submitted. All of these corrections have been reverified by CDFA auditors bringing all members into full compliance with the LGMA's requirements to ensure the safety of water used in farming leafy greens.

Horsfall explains that while it's true the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has not finalized water testing requirements for produce under its federal regulations, the LGMA has required extensive water testing since the program was created in 2007.

The LGMA in California currently represents 99 percent of the leafy greens produced in the state, which accounts for 80 percent of the lettuce and leafy greens consumed in the U.S. Meanwhile, the LGMA program in Arizona represents another 10 percent of the nation's lettuce and has similar water testing requirements.

In the years since the LGMA was created, several updates have been made to required food safety practices under the program. This includes sweeping new improvements adopted in 2019 that now stipulate any water from an open source -- such as a canal, reservoir or river – must be treated to ensure it is pathogen free if it will be applied via overhead irrigation within 21 days before harvest. Farmers are also required to test water throughout their irrigation system to ensure the water treatment is effectively removing pathogens.

“It’s simply wrong for anyone to claim that leafy greens farms in California are not testing their water – because they definitely are,” stresses Horsfall.

The LGMA continues to improve metrics in all areas of its food safety program and have just approved several additional changes in the area of farm water use. These will also become part of the government audits.

“Water is such an important part of food safety on lettuce farms,” says Horsfall. “LGMA member companies are working hard every day to implement these safe farming methods to prevent illnesses.”

Note: A short video on the LGMA water treatment requirements is available [here](#).

LGMA Member Audit Data for Water Use (April through July 2020)

