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## **United and restaurant industry to hold supply chain meeting**

January 5, 2005

WASHINGTON -- For the first time, top executives with produce companies and restaurants are planning to meet in early October to open a dialogue about supply-chain issues as part of a new partnership between the National Restaurant Association and the United Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Association.

United said that the partnership, which was announced Jan. 5, is part of a new focus on supply-chain issues, and the group is exploring a similar initiative to formalize the lines of communication with the retail segment.

Reaching out to the restaurant industry first was an easy fit since Jennifer Tong, United's new director of food safety and nutrition outreach, had been a food-safety director at the National Restaurant Association before coming to the produce association.

"Food safety is a top priority for both industries, and it's critical that all sectors of the restaurant supply chain for fresh produce work together as closely as possible," said Tom Stenzel, president and CEO of United. "United's partnership with the National Restaurant Association presents a tremendous opportunity for our respective industries to work together in addressing critical food-safety issues and better serve our millions of consumers."

In October, NRA's Quality Assurance Executive Study Group plans to meet with United to discuss how to enhance quality assurance for fresh fruits and vegetables throughout the food chain. On the table for discussion are topics such as the Produce Food Safety Action Plan, food security and Good Agricultural Practices. The meeting, which will be held in Ventura, CA, will include an opportunity for restaurant executives to gain first-hand knowledge of grower issues through a series of field tours.

With the Food & Drug Administration making clear that fresh produce safety is a top priority this year,

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the need to open a dialogue between suppliers and buyers has become crucial. Some high-profile outbreaks have tarnished the reputations of restaurant chains, which are usually held liable for food poisonings no matter where the foods were contaminated.

To the restaurant industry, it is "no longer acceptable to start food safety at the back door," said Steven Grover, vice president of health and safety regulatory affairs for NRA, adding that leading restaurant chains have been working to improve quality assurance and food safety through arrangements with their suppliers. "Now we're pushing it throughout the industry."

This partnership is an opportunity for the suppliers and the buyers to understand what each other needs and wants. "We have no idea where this may go," Mr. Grover added. It depends on what the produce industry wants and what the restaurant industry needs from its suppliers. "You can't know if you haven't talked."

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