
- Advertisement -

LGMA's plan to make romaine safer

June 2, 2020

A special new subcommittee has been appointed by the California Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement to focus on how land adjacent to leafy greens farms may be contributing to foodborne illness outbreaks associated with romaine lettuce. This action is part of a comprehensive review of all existing food-safety practices required under the LGMA program and is in direct response to findings from a U.S. Food and Drug Administration report issued last week.

“The role of the LGMA’s Adjacent Lands Subcommittee is to review current LGMA standards related to grazing lands and adjacent properties, gather all relevant research done by CPS or other entities and consult with stakeholders for additional input,” said Sharan Lanini, Pacific International Marketing, who serves as the chair of the LGMA’s Technical Committee and will be leading this important effort.

“As part of this effort, the Subcommittee plans to look at a number of factors including distance; slope and other physical properties; the impact of weather; potential barriers such as berms, diversion ditches or vegetative strips; and ‘good neighbor’ policies as they relate to properties located near leafy greens farming operations,” she said.

“Current requirements under the LGMA call for assessments of environmental conditions in and around leafy greens fields,” said Scott Horsfall, CEO of the LGMA. “But it’s clear more can be done to keep pathogens out of our farms.”

Last week the FDA issued a report on its investigation of what was actually three distinct outbreaks occurring in the fall of 2019. In the report, the *e. coli* strain linked to one of these outbreaks along with other STEC strains were detected in samples taken from cattle grazing land in proximity to where romaine lettuce crops were grown.

The FDA has stated it believes ruminants, most likely cattle, are the source of contamination in these outbreaks, but exactly how the pathogens end up on leafy greens remains a mystery.

“As leafy greens farmers we are committed to doing everything possible to make sure our products are safe,” said Dan Sutton, a leafy greens farmer and chairman of the LGMA. “If we knew what additional precautions could keep pathogens out of our fields, we would immediately make changes to our food safety program.”

The Subcommittee on Adjacent Lands comprises industry experts from LGMA member companies. They will be working closely with University and government researchers and meticulously examining past and current studies from the Center for Produce Safety and other relevant scientific research. The subcommittee also plans to engage with landowners of properties located near leafy greens farms, including cattle and other crops like wine grapes.

As with all areas of the LGMA’s required food-safety practices, the Adjacent Lands Subcommittee will be making recommendations as part of an open, collaborative process now underway for improving the safety of leafy greens. This process is being facilitate by Western Growers and is currently considering new standards for water used to grow leafy greens and for soil amendments and other crop inputs.

“Leafy greens farmers work hard every day to implement the best-known food safety practices,” said Horsfall. “Ultimately, the LGMA is the entity charged with updating and improving these standards to better protect consumers. The input provided by the FDA report and the work being done by our subcommittees, researchers and other stakeholders is critical to prevent future outbreaks.”

[Print](#)