



Roxann Bramlage, right, an auditor with the California Department of Food and Agriculture, monitors food safety conditions during harvesting of romaine lettuce in Salinas, Calif., Thursday, Aug. 16, 2007. Bramlage checked the site as part of an industry wide effort to police food safety. Government regulators never acted on calls for stepped-up inspections of leafy greens after last year's deadly E. coli spinach outbreak, leaving the safety of America's salads to a patchwork of largely unenforceable rules and the industry itself, an Associated Press investigation has found. (AP Photo/Paul Sakuma)

## E. Coli Fears Spark Bagged Salad Recall

By LISA LEFF – Sep 18, 2007

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — A package of Dole salad mix that tested positive for E. coli has triggered a recall in at least nine states, prompting new produce fears almost exactly a year after a nationwide spinach scare.

The tainted bag of Dole's Hearts Delight salad mix was sold at a store in Canada, officials said. Neither Canadian health officials nor Dole Food Co. have received reports of anyone getting sick from the product.

The voluntary recall, issued Monday, affects all packages of Hearts Delight sold in the United States and Canada with a "best if used by" date of September 19, 2007, and a production code of "A24924A" or "A24924B," the company said.

Last year, an E. coli outbreak traced to bagged baby spinach sold under the Dole brand was blamed for the deaths of three people and for sickening hundreds more across the U.S. Authorities eventually identified a central California cattle ranch next to spinach fields belonging to one of Dole's suppliers as being the source of the bacteria.

A recent Associated Press investigation found that government regulators never acted on calls for stepped-up inspections of leafy greens after that outbreak, and regulations governing farms in the fertile central California region known as the nation's "Salad Bowl" remain much as they were.

The latest recall affects packages sold in Ontario, Quebec and the Maritime Provinces in Canada and in Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Michigan, Mississippi, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Tennessee starting around Sept. 8, said Marty Ordman, a Dole spokesman.

Eighty-eight cases — or 528 bags — were distributed in Canada, and 755 cases containing 4,530 bags were distributed in the U.S., he said. FDA spokesman Michael Herndon said the agency was talking with Westlake Village, Calif.-based Dole about the situation.

The romaine, green leaf and butter lettuce hearts that went into the blend were grown in California, Colorado and Ohio, then processed at Dole's plant in Springfield, Ohio, on Sept. 6, according to Ordman.

An inspector from the Ohio agriculture department was at the plant Monday and Tuesday, said agency spokeswoman Cindy Brown. Tests performed on lettuce at the plant by Dole and the FDA came back negative for E. coli, she said.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency said it would be looking to find out at what point the salad blend became contaminated and to see if any other products are affected, spokesman Garfield Balsom said. "We'll go back and find the origins and determine where the product was produced and packaged," Balsom said.

Dole contacted the FDA on Sunday night, as soon as the company got word of the contaminated bag of salad in Canada, said Ordman. "They have been to our plant and they will visit the growers," he said.

The salad mix subject to the recall may have been available in the U.S. in states other than the nine already identified by Dole because in some areas the product was distributed by a wholesaler with clients in overlapping markets, Ordman said.

Food contaminated with this strain of E. coli may not look or smell spoiled but health

officials say the bacteria can cause life-threatening illnesses.

Symptoms include severe abdominal pain and bloody diarrhea; some people can have seizures or strokes and some may need blood transfusions and kidney dialysis, while others may live with permanent kidney damage.

*Associated Press writers Rob Gillies in Toronto and Andrew Bridges in Washington contributed to this report.*

On the Net:

- Recall: <http://tinyurl.com/2naakt>

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