



CCOF

Organic Certification Trade Association Education & Outreach Political Advocacy

For Immediate Release

Contact: Peggy Miars
Executive Director
(831) 423-2263, ext 21
peggy@ccof.org
www.ccof.org

CCOF Defends Organic Agriculture Against Attacks

Santa Cruz, CA, September 25, 2006 – “The tragic outbreak of E. coli O157:H7 in spinach that has killed one person and sickened nearly 200 others in 25 states, is being mistakenly linked to organic farming practices,” said CCOF Executive Director Peggy Miars. “Our sympathy goes out to the individuals and families affected by the outbreak. I’m concerned that misinformation is being spread about the source of the contamination and that organic is being unjustly blamed.”

On Friday, news of an “organic milk recall” added to the confusion. Three Southern California children were allegedly sickened with E. coli from raw milk sold by Organic Pastures of Fresno, California, which issued a recall of its products. “The facts are still being released. But, one important distinction that needs to be made is that the suspected milk is *raw (unpasteurized)*. All other name-brand and private-label organic milk meets all the same regulatory standards as non-organic milk,” said Miars.

According to the FDA, at this time, the only two confirmed sources of E. coli from spinach were traced back by the New Mexico Department of Health and the Utah Department of Health to packages of non-organic (conventional) Dole baby spinach packaged by Natural Selection Foods. Natural Selection Foods’ website states that all of the production codes taken from spinach packages retained by patients are from packages of non-organic spinach. However, the investigation is still underway. The FDA and the California Department of Health Services have advised Natural Selection Foods that test results from their California processing facility were clean.

The FDA has determined that the spinach implicated in the outbreak could only have been grown in three California counties (Monterey, San Benito and Santa Clara). Spinach grown in the rest of the United States is not implicated, and other produce grown in the three counties is not implicated. Processed spinach (e.g., frozen and canned spinach) is also not implicated

Farm investigations are in progress, focusing on fields associated with the production lots and brands implicated in illnesses as identified from available epidemiological data. Numerous samples have been collected to date including water, soil, sediment and other materials of environmental interest.

Organic food producers must meet all federal, state, and local food safety regulations and requirements in addition to the stringent federal standards for organic growing and processing. “Food safety is the number one priority for all food producers, whether organic or non-organic,” said Miars. “I suggest that consumers and food producers stay informed by monitoring the FDA’s website (<http://www.fda.gov/oc/opacom/hottopics/spinach.html>), which is updated regularly and includes a current list of the voluntarily recalled spinach brands.”

About CCOF

CCOF, a nonprofit organization formed by a group of grassroots activist farmers in 1973, is one of the oldest and largest organic certifiers in North America. CCOF’s purpose is to promote and support organic agriculture in California and elsewhere through:

- *A premier organic certification program for growers, processors, handlers, and retailers.*
- *Programs to increase awareness of and demand for certified organic products and to expand public support for organic agriculture.*
- *Advocacy for governmental policies that protect and encourage organic agriculture.*