



Press Release – For Immediate Release

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New Study from The Organic Center Focuses on Prevention of Future *E. coli* Outbreaks in Fresh Leafy Greens

A new Critical Issues Report, released in June 2007 and authored by The Organic Center's Chief Scientist Charles Benbrook, Ph.D., presents clear guidelines on helping to prevent future outbreaks of E. coli 0157 in the fresh leafy greens industry.

Boulder, Colo. – (June 13, 2007) – Much more than the fate of the multi-billion-dollar fresh leafy greens industry is at stake in the wake of last fall's *E. coli* 0157:H7 outbreak linked to pre-packaged spinach products. Why? Because increasing daily consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables is an essential first step in improving the health of the average American. Any factor that erodes confidence in the safety of fresh produce undermines ongoing efforts to increase consumption of these healthful foods.

According to a Critical Issues Report released in June 2007 by The Organic Center, the good news is that since last fall, growers and processors of fresh leafy greens, especially in California, have adopted significant, new prevention-based food safety practices aimed at preventing another outbreak. The study, *Unfinished Business: Preventing E. coli 0157 Outbreaks Caused by Leafy Greens*, is authored by The Organic Center's chief scientist Charles Benbrook, Ph.D. While noting progress made, the report highlights several additional steps that are justified in light of current science and the magnitude of the issue.

The Western Growers Association led the effort leading to adoption by processors and handlers of a set of "Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) Metrics." Market leader Fresh Express has committed \$2 million for research on how to prevent future outbreaks, and Natural Selection Foods has implemented a new "test and hold" program that has helped ensure that all shipped product is pathogen free.

"Prevention of foodborne illness outbreaks requires innovation, attention to detail and diligence from 'farm to fork,'" says Dr. Benbrook.

The new report provides an in-depth discussion of the likely causes of the 2006 outbreak, and includes a dramatic series of pictures of the outbreak field and surrounding area. “One lesson learned is that cattle, manure and fresh leafy greens make for a volatile mix,” according to Benbrook. Until more is known about how pathogenic *E. coli* finds its way to leafy green fields, the report calls for one-half mile separation between grazing cattle and leafy green fields. The GAP Metrics currently require only 30 feet.

The new report is available at no charge in .pdf form at The Organic Center’s website, www.organic-center.com. Click on “State of Science” in the menu bar and then on “Food Safety” to download the report, or go to http://www.organic-center.org/science.safety.php?action=view&report_id=97.

About The Organic Center

The Organic Center, based in Boulder, CO, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded in 2002 to generate credible, peer-reviewed scientific information and communicate the verifiable benefits of organic farming and products to society. By doing so, it promotes the conversion of more farmland to organic methods, improves public health and works to restore our natural world by promoting greater awareness of the benefits of organic products and production. For information about The Organic Center, its current programs and scientific reports please visit www.organic-center.org or call 303.499.1840.

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