

California Roundtable on Agriculture & the Environment
 Dialogue on Food Safety and Environment in Salinas
 December 10, 2007

PARTICIPANTS

Melanie Beretti	Monterey County RCD
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Willette Crawford	Growers Express
Noelle Cremers	CA Farm Bureau Federation
Will Daniels	Earthbound Farms
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April England-Mackie	Martin Jefferson and Sons
Christina Fisher	The Nature Conservancy
Corny Gallagher	Bank of America
Dirk Giannini	
Laura Giudici Mills	Metz-Fresh
Eric Holst	Environmental Defense
Tim Ibbeson	Lombardo & Gilles LLP
Luana Kiger	USDA NRCS
Mark Kramer	The Nature Conservancy
Alec Leach	Taylor Farms
Bill Loudermilk	CA Department of Fish and Game
Lisa Lurie	NOAA-Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary
Bob Martin	Rio Farms
Bob Mills	Tanimura and Antle
Daniel Mountjoy	USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service
Jovita Pajarillo	US Environmental Protection Agency Region 9
Kira Pascoe	CAFF
John Pattulo	Ocean Mist Farms
Paul Scheid	Ocean Mist Farms
Eric Schwartz	Dole Fresh Vegetables
Steve Shaffer	CA Dept. of Food and Agriculture
Trevor Suslow	UC Davis
Casey Walsh Cady	CA Dept. of Food and Agriculture
Jill Wilson	Central Coast Regional Water Quality Board

Objectives

1. Open dialogue
2. Exchange information
3. Identify opportunities

Ground Rules

- Listen
- Respect
- Suspend
- Voice

Themes

- Need for science and more research to help in identifying/developing food safety practices; it lags behind and perceptions are driving what gets implemented in the field
- Liability concerns and restoring consumer confidence
- End frenzy and pressure of “supermetrics” and endless upping the ante
- Need for one set of standards
- Regulatory agencies must be engaged
- Need for leadership
- Increase public awareness and education and, in turn, the media
- Need for a kill step solution

Presentations

Trevor Suslow, UC Davis Department of Plant Sciences

- Presentation of the current state of the science in contamination risks and vectors of transmission.

Daniel Mountjoy, NRCS

- Presentation of conservation practices in the central coast and their environmental benefits. He noted that in 2007, financial investment in conservation has dropped off; farmers are in a wait-and-see phase. A total of \$6.6M has been spent in the six counties in the Monterey Bay area over the last six years or so.

Melanie Beretti, Monterey Co RCD

- Presentation of key results of Monterey County Resource Conservation District’s August 2007 Growers Survey. (PDF is attached)

Focus Groups

These groups were comprised of individuals who self-selected to respond to initial questions provided in the agenda and offer perspective.

Handlers

Taylor Farms, Tanimura & Antle, Earthbound Farms, Metz-Fresh. The following are key points made by the members of the handler focus group:

Question: As handlers, what are the toughest pressures you face?

- **Restoring consumer confidence:** We had to restart from a dead stop because of the lack of consumer confidence.
- **We are still missing the kill step**
- **Minimizing customer liability:** Supermetrics may be a means to reduce liability.
- **Perception is driving food safety programs** and many are not backed by science. This results in guidelines being created by each buyer.
- **The dividing line between fresh cut and raw ag commodities:** We need to bring them together.
- **Educate the public** to take responsibility and wash produce. There is a difference between processed product and a commodity. This is a huge undertaking.
- **Getting the regulatory side engaged** to tell public about risks; address perception issues with consistent messages.
- **Facing pressures from many fronts:** Food Safety Leadership Council, multiple customers requiring higher standards.
- **Spending most of my time on food safety.**

Q: What process has guided your recommendations to your growers on practices? What practices have been implemented?

- **Follow LGMA GAPs plus rodent and amphibian control programs** to eliminate foreign objects in bagged leafy greens; lawsuits threatened when this is found in bagged greens.
- **Exclude animals of significant risk:** deer, pigs and dogs.
- **Identify risks in environmental systems and mitigate them.** The first step is to monitor for presence, and the action doesn't mean scorched earth policy. There are many environmentally friendly practices.
- **Concern for water quality standards** such as body contact and recreation. (Europe doesn't have them so not a concern for farmers there)
- **Work to get as close to industry standards as possible;** three to four different auditors and inspectors.
- **Each field is evaluated** for buffer zone; doesn't mean need to get rid of wildlife but rather rely on natural controls such as raptors for rodent control.

- **Not all parts of the GAPs are validated.** We support the guidelines because we are all fighting to have something. We are all working to validate the guidelines. It is a live document.
- **We want a single set of standards,** but buyers make it difficult to come up with a single set of standards. The standards need to be validated by metrics, and any standards that are not meaningful need to be dropped.
- **The standards must be able to be specific to individual fields and crops** as each has a different set of concerns. (e.g., water source, topography)
- **Conduct a hazard analysis** for each individual operation and controls. It is one way of being able to have a single standards and yet change parts of it according to the unique elements of the crop or field.
- **Much pushback on FSLC's supermetrics;** still a work in progress
- **Avoid taking information (which may be misinformation) and going with it.** Don't believe all that you read in the paper.

Q: What are the opportunities for change?

- **We want opportunities to work with environment and conservation groups;** to get people together and work through this.
- **LGMA as a vehicle:** It needs greater support and participation. The meetings are public and are a place to voice opinions and share concerns.
- **There is no one true leader among trade associations.** We need a torchbearer and an agreed upon unified stance among all parties.
- **We need federal involvement and leadership.** Other states such as Arizona now have a LFMA.
- **We need a federal marketing order** but it will take longer at the federal level.

Growers

Rio Farms, Ocean Mist Farms, Growers Express. The following are key points made by the members of the grower focus group:

Q: How are food safety standards impacting you? What pressures are you facing?

- **When we adopted the LGMA metrics it didn't change a whole lot.** We were already doing most of what was asked.
- **Everyone is paranoid or forced to be paranoid.** The frenzy came over demands from shippers, buyers and handlers.
- **I've observed changes in the valley:** traps, poison bait traps; vegetation pushed backed, pulled out; reservoirs attacked; fencing; chlorine being added to water sources
- **There is a lack of science;** I wonder how much we should worry about wildlife (deer, birds, etc.). There is just a lack of answers. The natural environment is better but depending of your position in the industry we have to be more cautious.
- **We need more research:** This frenzy is not going to stop and it is getting ridiculous. We are all trying to follow the metrics because everyone has

different rules. We will do it if proven that it will make food safe. It is frustrating.

- **We are not farmers anymore – we’ve become food safety experts**
- **We need a kill step**
- **We are doing a lot of things not proven to help yet.** For example, water samples taken from wells have not found to be unsafe yet. Do we need to keep testing this?
- **We are going to be judged by those few farmers who cut corners.** Most growers are following the rules, but some people take risks. It puts everyone at risk.
- **The media is driving the food safety frenzy.** It drives it beyond where it should be; no one got sick this year because of the awareness of and diligence on food safety. Safety is at a level among the industry where it’s never been before, the highest bar we’ve ever had set and the FSLC is raising it even higher.
- **These standards have a real financial cost.** If we can’t afford to be a business, who is going to feed everyone? Let’s put a stop on this until the science is clear.
- **Food safety has helped us to increase our diligence and collaborate with academia.**

Q: What practices have you changed as a result of these standards? What pressures are you facing locally and regionally around food safety?

- **Conflict created between metrics and conservation practices**
- **Water quality protection:** National Marine Sanctuary and the Ag WQ Alliance – Ag played a leadership role. Activities there neatly dovetailed with the RB3’s Ag waiver program which later evolved. Nothing we do to protect our water seems good enough. Everything is mitigated and now must be cleared out. Our hands are tied.
- **Bait stations kill rodents but also result in poisoning raptors.** Worry that with these changes the natural population will get out of balance.
- **Supermetrics require bare borders along fields;** erosion control practices removed; “clean fields” will result in serious sedimentation; some worry about serious land slippages (non-vegetated banks) in a high rainfall event
- **Growers feel caught in the middle.** Buyers and handlers state the requirements and do evaluations of the ranch. They tell you where you can and cannot plant. To survive you try to make every part of the ranch workable.
- **Animal tracks can result in a field being rejected.** Even droppings from a hawk can pose significant loss. These rules cost one farmer \$80K.
- **Some areas are safer than others.** Some grassed waterways are maintained but have placed bait traps. Fences are an issue until science and research says wildlife are not a significant risk.
- **With these demands, we can’t co-habitate with wildlife.**

- The waterways and natural vegetation to prevent erosion are now being cut back severely. Even the vegetated ditches to reduce and attenuate pesticides

Q: What would you really want right now?

- **A kill step**
- **Everyone to stand together, to stand by the same document**
- **Buyers to respect our stance**
- **A uniform set of standards** we live by that we and academia can work together to improve.
- **Everyone to get together to figure out what requirements actually make sense** and are effective and stand by that.
- **Standardized guidelines: a living document.** As those missing answers come in, we can update the guidelines.
- **Media to come in and pat us on the back for once.** Have buyers implement the same practices they are having us implement.

Conservation

Environmental Defense, USEPA, The Nature Conservancy, Department of Fish and Game. The following are key points made by the members of the conservation focus group:

Q: What are the places where you are most concerned?

- **Landscape scale**
- **Wildlife populations for the long term**
- **Wildlife being able to sustain themselves over time**
- **How the lands are managed** and how individual farmers operate now.
- **Risk Averse paranoia.** The farmers have to be economically viable, so they have to do these things. Are we actually gaining anything in food safety by cashing in the wildlife?
- **Finding common ground with Agriculture and Water Quality.** We've drawn inspiration from Salinas valley in the past. There are practices that would be beneficial and farmers are having to pull them out. After a lot of progress, now we are seeing it turn around. It feels like the decisions are coming from afar.
- **Supermetrics' impacts to water quality, habitat, wildlife and biodiversity.** The health of working lands and the overall watershed is impacted by these changes.
- **Invested stewardship having to come undone.** E.g.: watershed, biodiversity. Wonder if there is some deliberate ignoring of science. There is such a disconnect.
- **Undermining of trust and relationships that have been built over time.**
- **Concerned for the cumulative effect of the decisions of each farmer.** Beyond bounds of Salinas Valley, conservation values and Ag values work well together in other locations. These implications will stretch well

beyond California. We are an epicenter here. Getting it right here is critical.

- **Grass waterways**
- **Vegetative strips**
- **Reauthorization of the farm bill**
- **Water quality and how is that going to threatened endangered species.**
- **We need to separate foreign object vs. pathogens.** I've heard is that there is a need to resolve pathogen issues, and the industry sees a problem with foreign objects-frogs, mice. The info is scanty on what is actually happening.
- **I feel like we are losing the ground, the trust, we've gained over the last 100 years.** We need to be ahead of the issue.

Q: What our the best opportunity?

- **Use of science**, focused research, engage agencies to research.
- **Support Mary Bianchi's work.**
- **Expand membership of technical advisory committee** to include conservation. Figure our how can we form a solidarity to push back.
- **Working together** to get a reasonable science approach.
- **Carry the message to the public: What is good for Ag is good for Wildlife.** We are missing auditors and the media. Is there a way we can go together as Ag and Environ/Conservation? This can't turn into a battle between food safety and environment.

Large Group Dialogue

The group transitioned into a discussion responding to what they have heard in the meeting. The following are some key questions and comments:

Question: We've heard about meeting multiple standards. What do people think about a federal marketing agreement?

Comments:

- I have a concern about how the state and federal communicate and articulate with each other. Whatever the agreements are will need to make sense and be able to be articulated down to the farm level.
- Everything is ad-hoc on these metrics. We need an actual body that is cooperative, complex, and bases decisions on real science.
- The presence of a state marketing agreement hasn't stopped the proliferation of standards from other entities. I don't see how a federal marketing agreement would stop that.
- It would help if we had federal guidelines
- If there is a federal marketing agreement. There needs to be a hold on the one-upmanship.
- CAFF is against using the Marketing Act of 1937 for food safety purposes. We are interesting in looking for guidelines for all farmers but guidelines

that would be adaptable for each farm. The Marketing Act goes crop by crop and we're concerned about "different rules for different crops" for the farmers who have diversified crops.

Question: What is CRAE's role in moving this forward?

Comments:

- CRAE could organize/sponsor a workshop with industry's support to outreach to national big box buyers, handlers, shippers possibly piggy backing on one of their national meetings to keep the educational process moving forward.
- One of the perhaps more valuable roles CRAE could have is supporting the marketing Agreement board by being the entity through which information comes.
- The make-up of CRAE is pretty impressive; a cross section of credibility that adds more substance to the whole process. The group's impressive membership, however, needs to create *something*, a common framework we are standing behind. We need someone to say "these are the most critical areas to stand behind." (Response: There are already areas identified that all of the focus group have brought forth: common ground in the science.)
- Caution to CRAE in producing yet another document.
- CRAE should outreach to other areas growing leafy greens: Santa Maria, Imperial and Yuma, AZ
- Facilitation is a big role in CRAE

Question: Would all of this go away if there was a Kill Step?

Comments:

- No. We've already reached another level and will maintain the food safety guidelines. There is no silver bullet.

Question: Where are other opportunities?

Comments:

- **Endorse the LGMA**
- **LG marketing board could be a venue for dialogue**
- **Push back on supermetrics**
- **Develop a national science and research agenda on food safety**
- **Someone to take leadership:** Whoever takes leadership is going to deal with the litigation responsibility too.
- **Separate "foreign objects" from food safety** (rodents and frogs from waterborne pathogens such as e.coli)
- **The Water Board get more involved** becoming an active part of the planning.
- **Third Party auditors need to be involved** in this discussion. They drive a lot of it.
- **Science is going to give us general direction** but science is not "the answer."

- **Understand the grower/land owners complexities.** A lot of people don't understand the consequences to landowners (vs. those who lease the land) from food safety practices.
- **Unity – align our interests and values.** There is a notion that a there is someone "out there" determining these things. If we have a unified front here and can start to agree we will be more successful.
- **Educate auditors and buyers and the public.** Read Carl Nagin's article in the Sunday Chronicle Magazine: <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2007/12/16/CMMQSSF81.DTL&hw=how+safe+is+your+salad&sn=001&sc=1000>