

"While the FDA has made clear that their investigation is ongoing, they announced this afternoon that the outbreak of E. coli related to Taco Bell meals is most likely statistically related to chopped lettuce in the meals. I am assured that all the appropriate government officials are working to further define the source of the contamination.

"The FDA has not linked the chopped lettuce to a specific farm or area of the country. I have a close working relationship with the lettuce industry in the Salinas Valley, and I know they will go above and beyond the call to resolve the problem once the source of any contamination is identified, as they continue to do regarding the unrelated outbreak in bagged spinach earlier this year.

"Food safety is of paramount importance, both to consumers and producers. I have no doubt that workers in the fields and processors in the packaging houses are dedicated employees of the industry and will cooperate to help solve the problem. In addition, this outbreak highlights the need for additional research into E. coli and fresh produce so that the industry, food processors, retailers and consumers can make the best food safety decisions possible."