

Testimony for Segments of the Leafy Green Industry

My name is Kay Filice. I am the owner and operator of Filice Farms, in Hollister, California. I have been in the industry and in this position for the last 10 yrs. Filice Farms contract grows approximately 600 acres of romaine and spinach annually for several area shippers. The shippers then are responsible for the harvesting, packaging and marketing activities. Each of these handlers is a member of the LGMA.

As a grower of Leafy Greens during and since the ecoli outbreak in September 2006, I have been a participant in implementing the California's Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement. For the last three years, I have watched the program develop and evolve. I've seen growers and handlers work more closely with each other and with scientists, regulators, and researchers. The California LGMA has resulted in heightened awareness, increased communication and close collaboration that extends to the retailers and food service personnel. This increased communication has facilitated a better understanding what these LGMA standards are, what we look for, test and monitor in our food safety programs. Together we have raised the bar on food safety practices for our industry in the state of California.

I will admit in the early stages of the new LGMA Program, the metrics appeared somewhat daunting. I was concerned about how to implement these enhanced food safety standards and mandatory government inspections, of ALL the work involved, the costs, all the unknowns. Food safety had always been a priority on our farm, with my 3 boys and my employees usually eating the crops before anyone else. However it was obvious after the ecoli incidents in 2006 that we all needed to do more. Most family farmers I talked to also believed that these enhanced food safety standards and mandatory government inspections were vital to the continuing strength of our industry. Continuous improvements to food safety systems, based on sound science, must be made in order to protect our families, our employees and our consumers. In my mind, one of the greatest advantages of the LGMA is the ability to be quickly amended and updated as new science is unveiled.

I am a Mom and family farmer and while the increased water testing, employee training and record keeping is time consuming and can at time be burdensome, I have done it. Just like everyone else in this room, I remember..... what it was like when consumers lost confidence in our industry. The Industry changed in 2006 and we, as growers and handlers had to step up and change with it. Yes, it takes time to make changes. We all spent hours reviewing the standards, attending workshops and training seminars, and establishing more detailed documentation systems, but we did it. It's not impossible, and it's worth it.

EX. 41

I wouldn't expect our costs to increase significantly under the National Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement since we have already made the necessary changes on our farm to ensure compliance with the California LGMA. We have studied our costs and I have taken the time to review the financials in the business case study and agree that those numbers are in line with the costs we have incurred. A great deal of groundwork has been done, and there are resources available from the Leafy Green Industry that can benefit other small growers at little or no cost.

Since these enhanced food safety practices have now become our normal standard, they are also being applied to all our other crops, to specialty row crops and even tree crops. The monthly safety meetings provide regular reminders of good agricultural practices and good hygiene for our own employees. And All contractors working in any capacity on the farm are also required to train their employees to follow these same good practices. The testing, the signage, the constant vigilance benefits every one of the other crops we grow on our farm. Our experience has been positive; we've made some changes, but all for the good.

Personally my commitment is simple- I want to know that every carton that leaves Filice Farms is safe whether for my family and my employees, or yours. And I expect the same from every other grower and handler in every state. I would therefore like to go on record as supporting the NLGMA in an effort to ensure that the strictest standards in food safety are being applied across the board.