

FDA FACT SHEET

Status Update: 2020 Leafy Greens STEC Action Plan

Due to the recurring nature of outbreaks associated with leafy greens, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration developed a commodity-specific action plan designed to help foster a more urgent, collaborative and action-oriented approach to improving the safety of leafy greens. The [2020 Leafy Greens Shiga toxin-producing E. coli \(STEC\) Action Plan \(LGAP\)](#) outlines actions the FDA, in partnership with a variety of stakeholders, planned to take in 2020 to advance work in three areas: (1) prevention, (2) response and (3) addressing knowledge gaps.

While the year 2020 appears in the name of this action plan, our efforts will continue into 2021 and beyond. The FDA continues to make progress conducting research to fill knowledge gaps and inform science and risk based preventive measures, while also continuing to monitor the entire leafy greens supply chain to help ensure consumer safety.

The following are a list of actions that the FDA has taken in partnership with stakeholders, as of November 2020.

Prevention

The FDA engaged with partners to implement new strategies for preventing leafy greens outbreaks before they occur.

- Developed a [new testing protocol](#) to support the registration of antimicrobial treatments for preharvest agricultural water, which was developed through a collaboration with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. This protocol can be used for testing that supports registration of antimicrobial products for use against human pathogens in preharvest agricultural water and could provide farmers with new treatment tools to address water contamination.
- Provided technical assistance to a series of California Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement (LGMA) subcommittees who updated the California LGMA standards for safe harvesting of leafy greens.
- Engaged with retailer and food service stakeholders to encourage the strengthening of buyer specifications around use of third-party audits, enhanced traceability, assessing the impact of activities on adjacent and nearby land, and expanded use of root-cause analysis to enhance the safety of leafy greens.
- Continued collaboration with states and stakeholders to continue sampling and testing to enhance public health in response to outbreaks over the last several years.
 - Underway is a [Fiscal Year \(FY\) 2020-2021 raw agricultural commodity romaine lettuce sampling assignment](#). Samples continue to be collected from the Central Coast and Central Valley California growing areas as well as the Imperial/Yuma growing region.
 - In addition, in FY2019, the FDA [completed](#) a sampling assignment of romaine lettuce at commercial coolers in the Yuma, Arizona leafy greens growing region.
 - Developed improved sampling methods and analytical approaches to enhance environmental sampling for foodborne pathogens.

Response

The FDA collaborated with state and industry partners to assess and augment response and root cause investigation efforts when an outbreak has occurred.

- Published an [investigation report](#) on the 2019 outbreaks linked to the consumption of romaine lettuce from the Salinas Valley, California growing region.
 - The findings in the report reinforced the agency's concern about the impact of nearby and adjacent land use on the safety of leafy green crops and further underscore the importance of implementing appropriate risk mitigation strategies.
- Worked with state partners in California to maintain surveillance efforts during the 2020 growing/harvest season, specifically to further investigate harvest operations and environmental factors that may have contributed to the 2019 E.coli O157:H7 contamination of romaine lettuce from the Salinas Valley growing area.
- Partnered with the California Department of Food and Agriculture to prioritize routine Produce Safety Rule inspections of 38 farms that have been potentially linked to recent outbreaks.
- Released a new [outbreak investigation table](#) to communicate foodborne illness outbreak information frequently and as soon as the FDA begins an investigation. This new tool shares outbreak investigation information with the public even earlier in the process, prior to a public health advisory or recall being issued.
- Released the proposed rule, "[Requirements for Additional Traceability Records for Certain Foods](#)" (Food Traceability Proposed Rule), which, if finalized, would require additional traceability recordkeeping for certain foods, including leafy greens.
- Engaged with a coalition of industry organizations to support leafy greens traceability pilots to understand and foster interoperability of tracing systems across the leafy greens supply chain. A final report on the pilot is expected to publish in the near future.
- Worked with retail and state partners as part of the Shopper History Outbreak Partnership workgroup to enhance timely collection and transmission of purchase information needed to inform traceback investigations.
- Provided technical assistance in the development of a guide for conducting a food safety root cause analysis.

Addressing Knowledge Gaps

The FDA assessed past leafy greens outbreaks to identify areas of improvement important to enhance leafy greens safety.

- Initiated longitudinal study of the ecology of human pathogens in the environment of the California Central Coast growing region and supported a similar ongoing study in Yuma, Arizona, focusing on how human pathogens survive, move and possibly contaminate produce prior to harvest. Results from this collaboration are intended to lead to improved practices to prevent or mitigate food safety risks, and ultimately help enhance the safety of produce grown in the region.
- Contributed to a paper, "[What we've learned from a decade of STEC outbreak investigations linked to leafy greens in the United States and Canada](#)," which underscored the importance of federal and state health partners, researchers, the leafy green industry and retailers working together on interventions to reduce STEC contamination.

Looking Forward

- In 2020, the FDA reiterated our serious commitment to the safety of fresh leafy greens and acknowledged that we and the entire fresh leafy green continuum can and must do better to help protect consumers. The FDA intends to release a comprehensive report on the LGAP actions taken this year and to outline next steps as the agency continues implementation of LGAP activities as part of the [FDA's New Era of Smarter Food Safety](#).