E. COLI OUTBREAK TIMELINE: Twenty-six states were affected, and 200 cases of E. coli were reported. There were five deaths, but only three have been generally reported by the media and authorities. Losses are well above $100 million.

Sept. 13 Fresh spinach is suspected in E. coli outbreak across 19 states.

Sept. 14 Food and Drug Administration announces bagged spinach is thought to be possible source of contamination.

Sept. 15 FDA announces it suspects bagged spinach was produced by Natural Selection Foods LLC, San Juan Bautista, Calif. The company announces recall of 30 brands.

Sept. 17 FDA revises warning to include all products that contain fresh spinach.

Sept. 20 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention isolates genetic fingerprint in bag of Dole baby spinach found in refrigerator of person in New Mexico sickened by E. coli.

Sept. 29 FDA downgrades warning, giving specific brands and packaged-on dates instead of all products containing spinach.

Nov. 20 Mission Organics, Salinas, named as grower of tainted spinach.

Oct. 4 Federal Bureau of Investigation launches criminal investigation, conducts raids on Growers Express LLC, Salinas, Calif., and Natural Selection Foods.

Oct. 10 The Nunes Co., Salinas, announces recall of 8,500 cartons of green leaf lettuce, fearing E. coli contamination from irrigation water; later tests determine there was no contamination.

Oct. 26 A coalition of retail and foodservice buyers, including Tim York of Markon Corp. and Reggie Griffin of Kroger Co., send letter to produce industry groups requesting more stringent food safety standards.

Doc. 7 Taco Bell restaurants in four Northeastern states link sickness of 71 people to green onions supplied by Ready Pac, Irwindale, Calif., and grown by Boskovich Farms Inc., Oxnard.

Doc. 13 Green onions cleared as cause for Taco Bell outbreak. Attention shifts to packaged shredded lettuce, also provided by Ready Pac.

March 23 FDA and CDFA identify Paicines Ranch as source of E. coli contamination but cannot explain how the pathogen was transferred from cattle operation to spinach field.

April 2 Boskovich Farms sues Taco Bell Corp., Irvine, over lost green onion business and false accusations. Also, the California Leafy Green Products Handler Marketing Agreement is launched.

April 6 Taylor Farms LLC, Salinas, announces 22-cent-per-carton increase to cover food safety costs.

April 11 Fresh produce industry pledges $5 million to combat negative image from E. coli outbreak.

April 29 Dole adds 22-cent-per-carton surcharge to cover food safety costs.

Aug. 28 Metz Fresh, King City, Calif., recalls 8,118 cases of spinach after tests detect salmonella. No illnesses are reported.

June 23 Mandatory food safety audits begin for California Leafy Green Products Handler Marketing Agreement members.


Feb. 14 California Department of Food and Agriculture holds first meeting in Salinas to hear testimony on establishing statewide food safety marketing order.

Jan. 12 Fresh Express Inc., Salinas, announces $2 million donation for nine food safety research projects in a program that began before the outbreak.

July 23 Fresh Express guidelines for Production and Harvest of Lettuce and Leafy Greens released.