



FPC NEWS RELEASE

4 July 2011

UK fresh produce industry takes the hit for E.coli scaremongering and seeks action from UK Government

The UK fresh produce industry is suffering significant losses and a drop in consumption of salad products due to unfounded and premature claims linking fresh produce to the recent E.coli outbreaks in Germany and France.

The Fresh Produce Consortium (FPC) estimates that to date lost sales revenues for cucumbers, tomatoes and lettuce alone are around £54 million since initial reports erroneously linked fresh produce to the German outbreak. Sales of bean sprouts have fallen by 30 per cent since the German outbreak.

“These E.coli outbreaks are serious and it is vital that we get to the source of the problem very quickly. In the meantime the industry is taking a financial hit due to speculation on the source having a knock-on effect on UK growers and suppliers of sprouted seeds and other unrelated products,” said Nigel Jenney, Chief Executive of the FPC.

“UK authorities are hiding behind an over-application of the precautionary approach due to their lack of knowledge of the industry,” added Nigel Jenney. “As a result UK consumers have received confusing advice about which sprouted seed products are implicated and are being advised to cook products, some of which are meant only to be eaten raw.”

FPC has pressed the FSA to clarify its guidance urgently to consumers about which products are considered to be sprouting seeds and currently are expected to be cooked. There is no link between commercial UK sprouted seeds sector and these outbreaks.



FPC has contacted Vince Cable, Secretary of State, BIS, and has met with local MP John Hayes. FPC is urging the UK Government to support the UK fresh produce industry by:

- ensuring that the Food Standards Agency urgently clarifies its advice to consumers and the industry;
- restoring consumer confidence in eating safe, affordable healthy fresh produce through an immediate bespoke promotional campaign;
- calling on the European Commission to provide financial compensation for UK businesses affected.

“It’s appalling that there has been no recognition of the broader impact on other companies beyond the farm gate and only limited compensation offered to UK growers for just a few weeks of this protracted period. Defra and BIS must come off the fence now and the Department of Health must reinforce the benefits of eating fresh produce. We want to see the UK Government do more to fight the cause for the UK industry with the European Commission and rebuild UK consumer confidence,” added Nigel Jenney.

Food poisoning outbreaks linked with the contamination of fresh produce remain extremely rare in the UK. Good agricultural practices, hygiene preparations and packaging minimise the potential for contamination. The fresh produce industry has stringent standards in place to ensure that consumers can enjoy safe, healthy, good quality fresh produce.

Notes for editors:

- The Fresh Produce Consortium (FPC) is the UK’s fresh produce trade association and is based in Peterborough. The FPC has represented the fresh produce sector for many years and is recognised across the UK and EU as the voice of the industry.
- Extensive membership covers the complete spectrum of industry businesses including growers, importers, wholesalers, retailers, distributors, processors, packers, food service companies and other allied organisations.

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