

March 6, 2009

The Honorable Jim Costa
United States House of Representatives
1314 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Adam Putnam
United States House of Representatives
442 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Costa and Putnam:

As you know food safety is the produce industry's top priority. The men and women who grow, pack, and market fresh produce are committed to providing consumers with safe and wholesome foods. We are constantly working to enhance and improve our performance in growing crops in the field, carefully harvesting and handling them for distribution, packaging and processing commodities into convenient, ready-to-eat products, and doing all we can to maintain the safest possible delivery chain all the way to the consumer's table. However, recent events have led the produce industry to consider what role the federal government should play in managing food safety requirements for produce.

This is why I write you today, and to thank both of you for introducing of H.R.1332, the Safe Food Enforcement, Assessment, Standards and Targeting Act of 2009 (Safe FEAST Act). On behalf of our more than 1,500 growers, packers, shippers, fresh-cut processors, distributors and marketers of fresh fruits and vegetables, we believe this legislation will serve as a strong foundation for continued congressional debate as Congress considers reforming our nation's food safety laws.

In particular, the produce provisions in the bill related to developing commodity specific and science based preventive control standards represent good public policy. Directing federal resources to focus on those produce commodities deemed most vulnerable to microbiological outbreaks is a viable approach to produce food safety. In addition, developing a pilot program targeting effective traceback programs will enhance our ability to work with industry stakeholders and government officials to rapidly track and trace fruits and vegetables during a food-borne illness outbreak. Finally, this bill supports the coordination of activities between FDA, USDA and state governments with respect to education and enforcement of produce specific provisions. We strongly support this requirement to develop a comprehensive network of federal and state partners who will work with growers and our entire supply chain to provide education on good agricultural and handling practices, while assisting small resource farmers and produce distributors to comply with important food safety and traceability standards.

We believe your legislation is a positive first step in crafting much needed changes to our country's food safety laws. For fresh produce, our first and foremost commitment is to prevent foodborne disease outbreaks and product contamination from ever occurring. Our industry is committed to prevention and believes this legislation will help us move our industry forward. We also look forward to working with you on the issues we have outlined

in this letter to ensure that the produce industry is delivering to consumers the safest, healthiest and most nutritious fresh produce possible.

Thank you again for introducing the Safe FEAST Act of 2009. If you have any questions related to produce food safety, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert L. Guenther".

Robert L. Guenther
Senior Vice President, Public Policy