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UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ROSA L. DELAURO
3RD DISTRICT, CONNECTICUT

April 19, 2018

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Robert R. Redfield, M.D.
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30333

Scott Gottlieb, M.D.
Commissioner
Food and Drug Administration
10903 New Hampshire Avenue
Silver Spring, MD 20993

Dear Director Redfield and Commissioner Gottlieb:

I write regarding your Agencies' investigation into the current multistate *E. coli* O157:H7 outbreak that has resulted in 53 infections, including 31 hospitalizations, across 16 states. Specifically, I ask for clarity on your advice to consumers and seek a detailed update on the overall investigation.

I am alarmed by the inconsistent advice that your Agencies' have given to consumers. Consumers and families in my home state of Connecticut, and across the county, are confused as to whether they should avoid all romaine lettuce or just romaine lettuce that was grown in the Yuma, Arizona region. For an outbreak of this size and severity, that kind of confusion is simply unacceptable.

At the time of this writing, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) information web page for this outbreak¹ offers the following two bullets of consumer advice:

- *“Consumers anywhere in the United States who have store-bought chopped romaine lettuce at home, including salads and salad mixes containing chopped romaine lettuce, should not eat it and should throw it away, even if some of it was eaten and no one has gotten sick. If you do not know if the lettuce is romaine, do not eat it and throw it away.”*
- *“Before purchasing romaine lettuce at a grocery store or eating it at a restaurant, confirm with the store or restaurant that it is not chopped romaine lettuce from the*

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/ecoli/2018/o157h7-04-18/index.html>

Yuma, Arizona growing region. If you cannot confirm the source of the romaine lettuce, do not buy it or eat it."

The first bullet seems to suggest that consumers should avoid all romaine lettuce, while the second implicates only product sourced from the Yuma, Arizona growing region. Additionally, several industry groups have released their own statements with advice to consumers, which seems in conflict with prior consumer advice from CDC and FDA.

This mixed information is not helpful and, quite frankly, dangerous to public health. I urge you to correct this confusion by immediately releasing clear and consistent guidance to consumers.

The CDC estimates that around 48 million people are affected by foodborne illnesses per year, which results in 128,000 hospitalizations and 3,000 deaths. Furthermore, outbreaks and recalls have devastating economic impacts that affect the entire supply chain – from food retailers all the way back to the farm.

These impacts underscore the importance of the ongoing investigation and the need to ultimately identify the source of this outbreak. As such, I am requesting additional information regarding the investigation and ask for your written response to the following questions by May 7, 2018.

1. What is the current status of the investigation into the current *E. coli* outbreak?
2. Given that the investigation has narrowed to romaine lettuce grown in the Yuma, Arizona growing region, what barriers have prevented the investigation from identifying the source of the outbreak?
3. How many facilities in the Yuma, Arizona growing region have processed romaine lettuce within the last three months? To date, how many of those facilities have been inspected? How many have been subjected to sampling and laboratory testing?
4. If the investigation ultimately identifies an outbreak source, will FDA commit to releasing the names of implicated growers, processors and distributors of contaminated product?

Should you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact Christian Lovell on my staff at (202) 225-3661 or at christian.lovell@mail.house.gov. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress