



## FDA FOOD TRACEABILITY MEETING CONTINUES EMPHASIS ON PRODUCE

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How to trace shipments of fresh produce continued to be a lead topic in a recent field meeting held by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The meeting on Nov. 13 in Oakland, Calif., was FDA's second on food traceability.

This process is an effort to examine industry practices for tracing shipments of food through the supply chain to identify and mitigate the source of contamination when food-borne illness occurs. The current focus is on fresh produce, since it is more vulnerable because it has limited processing before consumption. However, much of the discussion indicated that any action taken by the FDA could set precedents for the whole food production industry.

Much discussion at the Oakland meeting centered on industry-led initiatives for improving traceability. The FDA representatives indicated that they would prefer to advance industry-led initiatives but would reserve the right to issue mandatory regulations in the face of inadequate action by industry. FDA officials expressed concern that companies vary significantly in their ability to produce adequate records in the case of a recall.

Indications are strong that Congress will debate legislation addressing food safety issues next year. A recent report by the Government Accountability Office listed food safety legislation among the top priorities for the new Congress. At this point several bills have been introduced, and what the final legislation could contain is uncertain.

Attending the meeting in Oakland were AFTC Executive Director Russell Laird and Nick Thompson of the California Trucking Association staff. Several ATA members located in California also attended, including Joe Antonini of Antonini Fruit Express in Stockton; Paul Trump of Mike Campbell Associates in City of Industry; and Noe LeGaspi and Peter Sheehan of Southwest Truck Service in Watsonville. The ATA members in attendance discussed the various practices used in the industry. In some cases the processor, or shipper, keeps all records. In others, customers require a more active role from the carrier, and drivers will record information from each pallet of produce loaded on a truck.

Other topics of discussion included the possibility of user fees to be charged to industry to pay for food safety inspections by FDA as well as the use of third-party certification programs.

As always, if you have any questions please let me know.