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Spinach... Good For You?

by

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Taking a little different tack in today's article, I would like to comment on something that, as of this writing, is still a concern of the National Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Thanks to the mass communication and immediate knowledge from all over the world, a health situation that could have been a lot worse is being corralled and investigated even as we speak. We all know that E. coli is a serious disease that has, for whatever reason, reared its ugly head over the last couple of decades and some thinking has been it can only be contracted through eating hamburgers that aren't cooked to death. Unfortunately, sources of the bacterium also include raw milk, un-pasteurized juice, contaminated water and meat, and uncooked produce.

This last source listed, in this case fresh spinach, is what has been creating havoc throughout the United States over the last few weeks, contributing to the illness of at least 114 and death of 1. Although no instances have been reported in WV 19 or more states have, including California, Connecticut, Idaho, Indiana, Kentucky, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, Nevada, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Utah, Virginia, Washington and Wyoming, and Wisconsin. Wisconsin was the home of the deceased person and thus far has produced 32 cases of this potentially deadly strain of E. coli.

This disease more adversely affects the older and younger generations while giving those in the middle a less severe reaction, usually diarrhea and upset stomach. Those who are more seriously affected can have total kidney failure if not treated soon enough. A healthy adult who becomes infected with this strain of E. coli, according to the Federal Drug Administration, should be symptom free after a week. Anyone who has eaten fresh spinach and suffered or suffers from any of the above symptoms should contact your doctor or health care provider.

Somehow, those of us who aren't too bright have no difficulty in associating E. coli with meat products. I know my mother warned me incessantly about eating undercooked pork since I was a wee thing. But who would have think that the food responsible for Popeye's strength... the stuff my mom kept putting on my plate only to find it still there at the end of the meal... SPINACH... is now the source of a potentially deadly disease... it's too weird.

The CDC and FDA are very quick to enlighten us that it is not the product itself that is the problem... it is how it's grown, harvested and packaged. Let's say a herd of cattle are in a field doing what cows do... grazing and recycling the grass in the form of manure back onto the field. And let's also say that pasture is located over top of an underground spring or water source that receives the fecal material from those bovine above. Let's go one step further and say that down the

road from the pasture is a large field used to grow acres of spinach and the farmer uses an irrigation system that acquires its water from the underground fecal contaminated source... with every drop of water going on that spinach there is also some of that recycled fecal material. The spinach has just become contaminated itself and morphed into a poison waiting to be ingested by an unsuspecting horde of spinach lovers.

Authorities have traced some of the contaminated spinach to Natural Selection Foods located in Salinas Valley, CA and are seeking the possible source of contamination. That area produces 75% of the nation's supply of hundreds of millions of pounds of fresh, packaged spinach and is known as the country's "salad bowl." Natural Selection Foods ships their spinach under their name brand and many other brands. Dole, Earthbound Farm, Natural Selection Foods, Pride of San Juan, Bellissima, Rave Spinach, Emeril, Sysco, O Organic, Fresh Point, River Ranch, Superior, Nature's Basket, Pro-Mark, Compliments, Trader Joe's, Ready Pac, Jansal Valley, Cheney Brothers, Coastline, D'Arrigo Brothers, Green Harvest, Mann, Mills Family Farm, Pro*Act, Premium Fresh, Snoboy, The Farmer's Market, Tanimura & Antle, President's Choice, Cross Valley and Riverside Farms are the most widely distributed names.

I've underlined just a few that I am familiar with in the area. Because the tainted spinach could have been included in packaged green salads that have spinach, the FDA is now warning that those products also might be contaminated. River Ranch Fresh Foods has pulled their produce from the market as well since they use spinach from Natural Selection Foods in their 3 Spring Mix salad bags. Natural Selection Foods of San Juan Bautista, CA began recalling all of its prepackaged spinach and its salad mix products that contain spinach in all brands packed with Best If Used by Dates of Aug. 17, 2006 through Oct. 1, 2006.

The Center of Disease Control and Prevention is diligently searching out all potential suppliers of the tainted product and trying to determine if other products might have contributed to this most recent outbreak as well. They suggest that throwing out any fresh spinach you have would be the wiser road to travel as opposed to trying to wash it thoroughly, since the bacterium could be within the plant and not just on the outside. They advise eating no fresh spinach until such time as the warning is lifted.

Natural Selection Foods has provided a toll free number for those who have purchased their product and have thrown it out for safety's sake. To receive a refund on monies spent for their product you should call 1-800-690-3200. This offer applies to their products or one of the companies listed above.

I realize many of you might have already seen this information on your TV or other news source but many have not. Hopefully you will stay spinach free until this situation has been resolved. In the meantime... stay healthy and eat plenty of pinto beans.