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BIG AG-PROVISION IN FARM BILL WORSENS ALREADY BROKEN FOOD SAFETY SYSTEM**SCHEME TO REGULATE NATION'S SPECIALITY CROPS THREATENS
CONSUMERS, THE ENVIRONMENT AND FAMILY FARMS**

DAVIS, Calif.—A coalition of consumer, family farm and environmental groups, representing millions of members, today expressed opposition to the Specialty Crop Marketing Order provision in the House version of the Farm Bill (HR 2419.EH § 10106). This provision was written at the request of the Specialty Crops Farm Bill Alliance, an alliance of big agricultural producer organizations and introduced March 2007, with little or no input from stakeholders. If enacted, the provision would allow the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agriculture Marketing Service (AMS) to work with industry to use profit-driven, mandatory marketing orders to regulate food safety for all specialty crops in the nation, including fruits and vegetables, nuts, dried fruits, and nursery crops. The result could weaken consumer food safety protection, harm family farm profitability, set back sustainable and organic farming, and wreck havoc on the environment.

Major national consumer and food safety groups, including Consumer Federation of America, Consumers Union and the Center for Food Safety, have written letters opposing the Farm Bill provision.

"If enacted, this scheme would fracture an already fragmented food safety system and leave consumers unnecessarily vulnerable to the risk of foodborne illness," said Rebecca Spector, West Coast Director of the Washington, D.C.-based Center for Food Safety. "Marketing orders are price control and quality assurance programs, not food safety programs. AMS not only lacks food safety expertise, but, as the mission of AMS is to help promote and sell agricultural commodities, it would also have a distinct conflict of interest as a food safety oversight body."

The application of marketing orders as a food safety tool began in the wake of the tragic 2006 *E. coli* 0157:H7 outbreaks caused by bagged salad, resulting in more than 200 illnesses and three deaths. In response, in California, industrial agriculture interests crafted the voluntary Leafy Green Marketing Agreement (LGMA), designed as a "food safety" measure for big leafy green producers that grow primarily for the "fresh-cut" or minimally-processed (bagged salad) industry. However, the LGMA does not take into consideration the diverse farming practices or conservation measures of family farms and does not target the source of *E. coli* 0157:H7. Data provided by USDA, and compiled by the Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF), shows that since 1999, 98.5 percent of *E. coli* 0157:H7 illnesses from leafy greens in California have been traced to bagged salad.

Marketing agreements and orders impose crop-by-crop rules on farms which do not work well for diversified farms. The rules that they enforce do not consider impacts upon the environment, consumers, small-scale or diverse farms.

"The experience of the LGMA has demonstrated the problem that a 'one size fits all' food safety approach poses for family farmers: it is controlled by the largest grower-shippers and processors and small distributors and farmers have virtually no representation," explained Judith Redmond, President of CAFF and partner at Full Belly Farm in northern California. "This provision could pave the way for multiple marketing orders which could threaten the nation's produce supply by making compliance practically impossible for family farmers and for diversified, sustainable and organic producers."

The LGMA imposes a set of standards on farmers on the conditions in which farmers can grow their crops. According to a survey by the Monterey County Resource Conservation District, the location that has been the focus of these standards, more than 88 percent of the surveyed farmers stated that they have taken measures to remove or discourage wildlife from their fields as a result of the LGMA standards and other more strict standards imposed by buyers of produce.

"In California, growers of leafy greens are facing pressures to abandon environmental practices to satisfy arbitrary and unscientific requests from buyers," said Kim Delfino, California Director of Defenders of Wildlife. "We have seen the removal of conservation and wildlife habitat practices, such as hedgerows, riparian buffers, and grassed waterways, which, if implemented on a large scale, will undermine years of investment and impede localities' ability to comply with environmental laws, including the federal Clean Water Act and California clean water law."

A recent report issued by CAFF, *The History, Politics & Perils of the Current Food Safety Controversy: CAFF Guide to Proposed Food Safety Regulations*, explains why marketing agreement and marketing order models are not appropriate as a food safety regulatory tool, and will not reduce pathogens in the environment, protect consumers or encourage environmental stewardship. CAFF is working on alternative rules for diversified farms with produce distributors, the University of California, and other government agencies to create a practical, environmentally sound approach to food safety.

A coalition of 40 organizations and businesses that signed a letter opposing the Farm Bill provision include: A&A Organic Marketing, Inc., ALBA (Agriculture & Land-Based Training Association), Audubon, Bon Appetit Management Co., California Farmers Union, California Food & Justice Coalition, Center for Food Safety, Chefs Collaborative, Coevolution Institute, Community Alliance with Family Farmers, Defenders of Wildlife, Food & Water Watch, Izaak Walton League of America, Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association, Mangrove Action Project, Marin Organic, Marion County Beekeepers Association, Mission Pie, National Family Farming Coalition, National Organic Coalition, National Wildlife Federation, Natural Resources Defense Council, New Mexico Wilderness Alliance, Organic Consumers Association, Organic Farming Research Foundation, Organically Grown Company, Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations, Partners for Sustainable Pollination, Pioneer Organics, Roots of Change, Sayer Ranch of Santa Paula, CA, Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, The Cornucopia Institute, The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation, Union of Concerned Scientists, Urban Tilth, Valley of Heart's Delight, a project of Conexions, Veritable Vegetable, Wild Farm Alliance, Work Family Ranch of San Miguel, CA.

Links:

Coalition Letter: http://www.caff.org/foodsafety/documents/Foodsafety_letter_FBCConf.pdf

CFA Letter:

http://www.consumerfed.org/pdfs/Marketing_Orders_Letter_to_Ag_Cmtes_Jan_2008.pdf

CAFF Food Safety Guide: http://www.caff.org/foodsafety/documents/CAFF_Policy_Guide_Summary.pdf
and <http://www.caff.org/foodsafety/documents/CAFF.Policy.Guide.1.pdf>.

Monterey County RCD Grower Survey:

http://www.caff.org/foodsafety/documents/RCDMCGrower_Survey_August202007.pdf

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