

Quarterly Scientific Seminar January 6, 2011

Participant Questions Answers from Carol Myers and Jeff Higa, California Department of Public Health

- Q: Carol, the final organism was introduced by raw seed, right? Any regulations on imported raw pepper seeds available?
- A: It was determined that seed contaminated with Salmonella Rissen was responsible for the outbreak. I am not aware of any regulations specific to imported pepper seed. Sanitation and seed condition are under regulation, but there are no regulations that state that seeds must have a kill step before being imported into the US.
- Q: Jeff, is every state in FoodNet Survey or just EIP sites?
- A: Foodnet includes: Contra Costa, Alameda, San Francisco Counties in CA, the state of CT, GA, MD, MN, NM OR and TN and selected counties in CO and NY.
- Q: I might miss this part. Does this manufacturer open their business again? If so, when?
- A: Union International began processing spices, oils, and sauces in July or August 2010.
- Q: A question for Carol. Thanks, Carol, for your presentation. Would you please define this UFIC more? How many employees? Have you tested any employees?
- A: At Union International Food had approximately seven employees. The workers were not tested
- Q: So it sounds like now this firm is being held to a higher regulatory standard than other firms? (e.g., the HACCP requirement). Is that a reasonable way to approach food safety for the spice industry---go after the ones that have had documented outbreaks?
- A: The spice industry has many different components including importers, warehouses, distribution centers, and repackaging facilities. The majority of spice companies in California operate according to the Good Manufacturing Practices. The Food and Drug Branch completes risk-based inspections that focus on a variety of components including any previous recall history. I believe that focusing resources on companies with documented outbreaks will help protect the health of the public.
- Q: What were the past results of this facility's EH inspections?
- A: An FDB inspection was conducted on 1/22/2009, and a Notice of Violation was not issued.

- Q: Regarding the "steam washed" label on the product, you mentioned that this was not a sufficient kill step. Was the pepper actually found to have been "steam washed," or was there any other (insufficient) attempt at a kill step?
- A: We only know that the seed was sold as "steam washed," with documentation containing those words. We did not attempt to prove or disprove whether or not this product underwent a steam wash step. Our investigation determined that the seed did not receive any type of kill step treatment.
- Q: Re: the generic issue of spice irradiation. We were told by somebody in this investigation that while spices are legal to zap, they would still have to be labeled as such (e.g., with a radura). Thus, the spices that are sold in little jars etc that don't have a radura are not irradiated, and that as a result most of the retail spices in this grocery store, for example, are NOT irradiated. Can you comment on the efficacy of steam treatment or other pathogen-reduction methods for spices; how effective are they? We heard that random spice testing finds rather high levels of Salmonella and other pathogens.
- A: This firm included the radura label for all spices that were reconditioned with an irradiation step. This was for intact recalled spices returned to the firm. Steam washing of seeds is mostly done to remove dirt.
- Q: Is the FoodNet Population Survey available to the public?
- A: The link for the 2006-07 survey is:
http://www.cdc.gov/foodnet/surveys/FoodNetExposureAtlas0607_508.pdf.
The link for the 2002 survey is <http://www.cdc.gov/foodnet/surveys/pop/2002/2002Atlas.pdf>.