

LGMA Hearing – Monterey, CA
September 24, 2009

Good morning. My name is Josh Hinerfeld. I am the CEO of Organically Grown Company.

Organically Grown Company distributes a broad range of fresh, certified organic produce primarily to retail accounts in Oregon and Washington. We source produce from over 300 suppliers that range in size from a few acres to operators that operate in multiple states. Approximately one-third of our sales are derived from product that is grown in the Pacific Northwest.

20 growers own a majority of our company. Employees own the balance. Three of the eight members of our board of directors are growers, who live and farm in Oregon. Not surprisingly, we have considerable empathy for our growers.

We don't confuse empathy for pity. The inconvenient truth for our industry is that we have a food safety problem – both real and perceived. We expect all of our suppliers to take concrete measures to mitigate the risks of pathogen outbreaks. To do otherwise, would be morally and financially irresponsible.

Another inconvenient truth is that our nation's food supply is becoming increasingly insecure. Lengthening supply chains, climate change, peak oil, water supply issues, and the reduction of farmland are increasing the risk of future supply disruptions. Supporting the viability of a decentralized network of farms around the country will help buffer future supply disruptions.

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Here's the rub. A small or medium-sized leafy green grower situated in the Pacific Northwest can't achieve the efficiencies of a leafy green grower in the Salinas Valley due to the lack of scale as well as the Northwest's shorter production season. Yet, a number of these growers in the Pacific Northwest have overcome difficult odds, by serving a growing segment of the market that is seeking fresh, locally-grown products. The growth of farmers markets, CSAs, and promotions featuring regionally produced foods by grocery retailers is affirmation of this trend.

Just because a farmer is known and respected by his clientele provides absolutely no guarantee or assurance that farm operates in a pathogen-free zone.

Everyone engaged in the production, harvesting, processing, distribution and sale of produce has an individual and shared responsibility of coming up with an answer to the following question: "What are you doing to insure that the food you sell is safe?"

Until recently, our company didn't have a satisfactory answer to that question. So, we started researching steps that we could take to identify and mitigate risks in our supply chain. Our research indicated that our growers are all over the continuum of food safety preparedness. Some growers in the Pacific Northwest lack a basic understanding of pathogens, the critical control points in their operations and the steps they can take to control them. Many are confused about how to proceed given the proliferation of food safety auditing protocols and retail-driven mandates.