

VegNet



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2009 Summer Forecast. April Heat May Ultimately be the Hottest of the Summer for Many in the East. From: AccuWeather.com By Henry Margusity

The heat wave that occurred in late April across much of the East may ultimately be the hottest and longest duration of heat across much of the East this year. The core of the coldest weather will become anchored over the Ohio Valley and Great Lakes, which means temperatures in the 70s and 80s, and few days topping out in the 90s. With that said, we expect areas from southern New England into the Carolinas to have exceptionally high humidity this summer. So while it might not be hot temperature-wise, the humidity will still make it feel uncomfortable.

The overall jet stream pattern will have a trough of low pressure in the East and a ridge of high pressure in the West. The corridor from the northern Plains through the Great Lakes, Ohio Valley and Northeast will have frequent rounds of thunderstorms. No area may become too wet, as the rounds of storms will just continue through the region and not stay in any one location. The good news with that means areas from the Midwest through the Great Lakes and Northeast will have times when dry, cool air masses settle in, bringing comfortable weather conditions.



Proposal May Recommend Agreement for Leafy Greens Handlers, Growers

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COLUMBUS, Ohio -- Commercial growers and handlers of leafy green vegetables are anticipating the introduction of a proposal recommending a new national agreement for the production and handling of leafy greens.

The proposal, called "Marketing Agreement Regulating Leafy Green Vegetables," is expected to be submitted to the U.S. Department of Agriculture before the end of June. It is backed by the national Leafy Greens Council and the Western Growers Association and has had input from growers as well as distributors, processors and other "handlers." The goal is to reduce the risk of food safety problems related to leafy greens, such as the E. coli outbreak that occurred in fresh spinach in 2006. A draft of the proposal is available at the Western Growers Association Web site at <http://www.wga.com/default.php?id=858>.

"We want to make sure growers in Ohio and other states are aware of what's taking place and to have a seat at the table," said Doug Doohan, fruit and vegetable specialist with Ohio State University Extension and a leader of the Ohio Roundtable on Safe Production of Fresh Produce.

"There has been some concern that any new rules would put smaller growers -- which we have in abundance in Ohio -- at a disadvantage," said Doohan, who also has an appointment with the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. "That's not necessarily the case, but the more people know about what's being proposed, the better."

The potential proposal was discussed on May 6 at a meeting of Roundtable, which has met annually since 2007. The Roundtable is composed of Ohio produce growers and retailers as well as Ohio State faculty and staff. It aims to foster communication between growers, researchers and Extension specialists and identify focus areas for programs involving Ohio's produce industry.

At the recent meeting, organizers invited Melissa Schmaedick, a senior marketing specialist with the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service, to explain the process for marketing agreements such as the anticipated agreement for leafy greens. Schmaedick said that as a marketing agreement, the proposal must be industry-driven and, if it successfully goes through the process, will apply only to handlers who sign up to participate in the agreement and the growers who they accept produce from.

However, large retail outlets may decide that they will purchase leafy greens only from handlers who participate in the agreement. If that is case, then the agreement will, in

effect, apply to all major growers and handlers, as well as to small growers who hope to someday sell product to large grocery stores and similar outlets. "That's why everyone needs to offer their input as the process unfolds," Doohan said.

Schmaedick said the agreement would not apply to growers who sell to consumers directly, such as through farmer's markets, CSAs (Community Supported Agriculture) or produce stands. Also, she said the USDA is required to review potential agreements to be certain they don't put an undue burden on smaller growers.

Participants at the Roundtable reviewed a draft of the agreement proposal. Currently, the draft calls for:

-- Forming a Leafy Greens Products Administrative Committee which would include representation from growers and handlers from five regions across the United States. Ohio would be in Zone 4, which would also include Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia, as well as representation from retail, food service, the public, and importers.

-- A subcommittee, the Technical Review Committee, which would develop uniform, auditable, science-based sets of good agricultural production and handling practices designed to enhance the safety of leafy green vegetables. Regions would develop their own standards to take into account regional differences in growing and handling practices. Each region could even decide to develop different guidelines for different types of producers (organic, small growers and large growers, for example), as long as the end goal of safe produce remains the same.

Some participants in the Roundtable wondered if they would be subjected to another inspection under the program, but others suggested that having such a system could take the place of other inspections and reduce "audit fatigue," in which growers must comply with five or 10 different audits from different parties.

Others asked if the standards developed would be based on a similar program now in place in California, the California Leafy Greens Handler Marketing Agreement (online at <http://www.caleafygreens.ca.gov/>), but since recommended practices wouldn't be outlined until committee representatives are named and the Technical Review Committee is formed, it's not clear yet what all of the metrics will be. One participant noted that thousands of growers in California are not participating in the state agreement because they find it too difficult to meet the standards it set.

Schmaedick told participants that the process to form a new agreement is a lengthy one. After the proposal is officially sent to USDA:

-- A notice for a hearing is prepared, reviewed, cleared, and published in the Federal Register.

This step alone usually takes two to three months, she said.

-- Mailings and public notice may take place (30 days).

-- Public hearings could begin 30 days after the public notice period is completed.

-- Transcripts from hearings are delivered and reviewed by those who have testified at the hearings.

-- The USDA prepares a recommended decision and publishes it in the Federal Register for comment.

-- A 30-day public comment period usually takes place.

-- The USDA incorporates information gathered from public comments and the Secretary's

Decision is published.

-- Handlers sign up if they decide to participate in the agreement.

-- The Final Order is prepared, reviewed, cleared and published.

-- The agreement's Administrative Committee is nominated, Technical Review Board members named, and the office is set up and staff hired.

Only at that point, usually 18 to 20 months after the proposal is officially filed with the USDA, will guidelines for growers and handlers be recommended, Schmaedick said. Even after the recommendations are made, it can take about three months to approve and implement them before the program becomes fully operational, she said.

Still, Doohan said, now is the time for interested parties to begin learning more about the potential proposal and offer their input. He suggests contacting the Leafy Greens Council (contact information at <http://leafy-greens.org/contact.html>), the Western Growers Association (<http://www.wga.com>), or the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Services at <http://www.ams.usda.gov/maob>.

New Website: Welcome to the Ohio State Food Safety Program Website, *Creating a Future with Safer Food*◆

<http://foodsafety.osu.edu/>

By Terence Kline

This is a website that serves our OSU Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Food Safety Team but is becoming even more than that. We are trying to make it a comprehensive site for information on all food safety issues. It is still in the construction phase but we are constantly adding content and welcome suggestions on things that might make it better. As we develop more fact sheets and educational powerpoints, etc. they will be added also.

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