

Feds catching up with California food safety standards

By Michael Doyle, McClatchy News Service

WASHINGTON – California lettuce and spinach producers are now closer to their goal of unifying farm safety standards nationwide.

Five years after E. coli-contaminated spinach sickened hundreds and killed three, the Agriculture Department on Friday formally proposed a “leafy greens marketing agreement” that would essentially extend California’s leafy greens regulatory system nationwide.

“This ... provides an opportunity for farmers, handlers and retailers of all sizes to work together and develop a practical program,” Deputy Agriculture Secretary Kathleen Merrigan said.

Governed by a 26-member board, including as many as seven handlers and producers from California, the marketing agreement would set binding standards on everyone who signed up. These would include recordkeeping, soil testing and field sanitation requirements, among others.

The existing California Leafy Green Marketing Agreement, put in place after the 2006 E. coli outbreak, covers nearly all of the lettuce and spinach produced in the state.

[Read the whole story](#)