



Hidalgo County Health and Human Services Department

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Health Authority / Chief Physician

Eduardo Olivarez
Chief Administrative Officer

October 22, 2015

Commissioner Eduardo Cantu, Precinct 2
County of Hidalgo
300 W. Hall Acres, Suite G
Pharr, TX 78577

Dear Commissioner Cantu,

The Hidalgo County Health & Human Services Department (HC-HHSD) has been made aware of a public health concern that involves bovine fecal matter being improperly contained and transported near produce fields which may be at risk of cross-contamination. This is an issue that must be addressed immediately to assure the public health and safety of the residents and to safeguard the nearby produce from contamination with disease-causing microorganisms.

The main microorganisms found on bovine fecal matter include *E.coli O157:H7*, *Salmonella sp.* and *Listeria monocytogenes*. These human disease-causing pathogens may lead to a foodborne outbreak and hospitalizations or deaths to immune-compromised individuals (i.e., children, older adults, pregnant woman, unborn fetuses, and chronic disease patients). The most common signs and symptoms of these foodborne illnesses include, but are not limited to: abdominal cramps, nausea, vomiting, and fever.

The additional attestation demonstrating this as a public health risk is evident from the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension correspondence from Juan R. Anciso, Ph.D, dated October 16, 2015 (attached); therefore, I strongly encourage Precinct 2 to take measures to remedy this potentially hazardous situation. The primary goal is to protect the health and safety of our residents in Hidalgo County and any potential consumers.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at eddie.olivarez@hchd.org and/or (956) 457-1772.

Respectfully,

Eduardo Olivarez, Chief Administrative Officer
Hidalgo County Health & Human Services

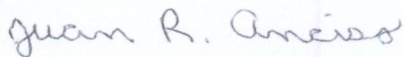
TEXAS A&M AGRI LIFE EXTENSION

2401 East Highway 83
Weslaco, Texas 78596
October 16, 2015

To Whom It May Concern:

It has been brought to my attention that cattle fecal matter from trucks is near produce fields and what human health concerns could this situation create. In recent years, many cases of foodborne illness and deaths have resulted from disease-causing microorganisms (pathogens) on fresh produce. These human disease causing pathogens come from fecal matter of domestic and wild animals. The CDC lists animals of concern such as cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, deer and elk for produce growers to take the best exclusion measures possible to prevent fecal contamination of the produce fields thus reducing the risk of a foodborne outbreak on their produce crop. The main microorganisms found on cattle fecal matter include *E. coli* O157:H7, *Salmonella* sp. and *Listeria monocytogenes*. *E. coli* O157:H7 is commonly found in the gastrointestinal tract of cattle. Researchers have found it in up to 34 percent of the fecal samples collected at cattle holding operations, dairy farms and slaughterhouses. The 2006 foodborne outbreak on spinach was traced to *E. coli* O157:H7 that was later recovered from fecal matter of cattle and wild hogs which were near the spinach fields. Through DNA technology/fingerprinting, it was established that the source that caused hundreds of individuals to get ill as well as 5 individuals to pass away was from those nearby cattle and the one wild hog that was slaughtered. Therefore, produce operations take cattle operations and certain types of animal fecal matter very serious since previous produce foodborne outbreaks have been traced to them. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,



Juan R. Anciso, Ph.D.
Professor and Extension Specialist
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