

PMA poll shows attitudes warming to spinach

**By Don Schrack, The Packer**

(Nov. 9) LAS VEGAS — A poll commissioned by the Produce Marketing Association, Newark, Del., indicates consumer confidence in spinach is growing — slowly.

PMA president Brian Silbermann released the findings Nov. 7 at the 81st annual meeting of Western Growers.

Silbermann was one of five industry leaders participating in a workshop on food safety. The others:

Tom Stenzel, president of the United Fresh Produce Association, Washington, D.C.;

Jim Bogart, president and general counsel for the Grower-Shipper Association of Central California, Salinas;

Tom Russell, president of Pacific International Marketing Inc., Salinas; and

Tom Nassif, president of Western Growers, Irvine, Calif.

The poll, conducted Oct. 10-12, found 72% of shoppers who previously bought spinach said they were “very likely” or “somewhat likely” to purchase fresh bagged spinach again. A similar survey conducted Sept. 18-19 found 49% of previous buyers rated bagged spinach “not safe at all.” In October, that figure dropped to 8%.

Among shoppers who had previously purchased spinach, the October poll found 47% had already bought spinach again or would do so in a few weeks. In September, 43% of the consumers were prepared to buy spinach again.

Nassif said Western Growers’ ongoing effort to establish a marketing agreement and a marketing order in California to address food safety issues reflected unprecedented cooperation among the major associations.

“We chose not to wait to let lawmakers and regulators tell us what we must

do to make our products safer,” Nassif said. “Everybody in the produce industry must be part of the solution, not just the vegetable growers.”

Bogart said meetings on proposed plan have already taken place with growers and other industry officials participating. He said the discussions have been comprehensive and have focused on risk assessment.

“We looked at all potential areas of weakness including water, soil amendments and wildlife,” Bogart said.

Bogart said draft documents on the marketing agreement and marketing order would be ready for industry review in about two weeks. He said the group hopes to finish the documents by mid-December.

Stenzel agreed that the industry must do better at all levels of the produce chain, including retailers.

“Perfection is a tough, tough goal to achieve, but it’s expected of growers,” Stenzel said.

Russell said the reality is growers simply can’t stop wild pigs, deer or migratory birds from contaminating crops. He said technology is the answer to the problem.

“Growers must be permitted to sterilize our products just as processors of frozen and canned foods sterilize their products,” Russell said