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but the insight isn't.*

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More 'Summing Up' Of Sprout Situation

Jim Prevor's Perishable Pundit, May 29, 2009

Our continuing analysis of the alfalfa sprout [recall](#) brought this letter from a small grower:

Bravo!

You did a great job investigating the alfalfa seed issue.

1) You covered the FDA's basic stance, which seems to be "we'll sorta say something that if you get a psychic you might be able to figure out" sorta thing. Interestingly in a position paper back a few decades ago, the FDA asserted its authority over mung bean seed used for sprouting; however, given the complexity of world trade it's understandable that they haven't pursued this. But I have to say that it is a step forward for the FDA to make seed the center of an official sprout notice.

2) As a former sprouter I learned to avoid Caudill seed a long time ago. They are cheap, but this is what you get. Great work getting to the bottom of the seed-certifying, GAP's, etc. I believe Caudill has been associated with most of these outbreaks. Their assertion that most of the seed they sell is organic is just not true — not that organic would assure clean seed, but they have never been big suppliers of organic. One thing organic does have, if done right, is better traceability. [Editor's Note: See interview with Caudill Seed spokesperson Lyle Orwig [here](#).]

3) I would have liked to see some follow up with Jonathan's Bob Sanderson and International Specialty Supply's Bob Rust. Together they have worked out a seed-testing regime that gives high statistical confidence and should be used in sprout-seed testing all of the time. The chlorine rinse has been called into question in various studies as being ineffective. It's telling that no other country that I'm aware of has chosen to go the chlorine route, but in Australia at least one of the provincial governments is recommending the ISS seed-testing regime. [Editor's Note: A letter from Dan Lasic keyed off a discussion of these issues, and you can find that piece [here](#). We also had a "dueling letters" exchange with both Bob Rust and Bob Sanderson. You can see that [here](#).]

4) A decade or so ago, I had a conversation with the California Ag Dept about pesticide use on sprouting seed. They asserted, as you have discovered, that as far as the regulations are concerned, there is no difference between seed for sprouting and seed for planting.

5) In recent private conversation with a seed supplier sourcing from Australia, it was revealed that the supplier was finally going to ask the grower to keep the cattle out of the field. So Chet Boruff would be right that in growing varietal or foundation seed, cattle would not be grazed in the field, but sprout seed is not grown for later replanting of particular varieties. So I believe that it is likely if not probable that sprout seed, alfalfa and clover is grown under grazing conditions.

6) It strikes me that you and your staff have gotten very conversant in the areas of FDA recalls, epidemiology, etc. How about a summing up for us? It would be really interesting to get your impressions of the state of the nation when it comes to produce and food safety.

We appreciate the thoughtful analysis from our correspondent. We too remain frustrated that the FDA will not be clear and specific.

Summing it all up maybe is a little too ambitious a project for a Friday, but we will work on it.

In the meantime, there is an awful lot of summing things up in our "Hot Topics" buttons that you can find on the left hand side of this page. Then, of course, there is always [The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy](#), where after seven-and-a-half-million years of processing, the supercomputer named Deep Thought reveals that the "Answer to the Ultimate Question of Life, the Universe, and Everything" is 42. That should hold you for now.
