Salad Mix Production Halted After Stomach Bug

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — A Mexico processing facility voluntarily suspended production of salad mix that's been linked to the outbreak of a stomach bug in Iowa and Nebraska, a California company announced Monday.

Salinas, California-based Taylor Farms said its Mexican branch, Taylor Farms de Mexico, will not resume production and shipping of any salad mix as well as lettuce and other salad mix components without approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Production stopped Friday and has been shifted to domestic crops and processing facilities in the United States.

Company officials said the suspension, which is expected to last several weeks, allows Taylor Farms de Mexico to assist federal authorities in their investigation into the cyclosporiasis outbreak, a stomach illness that has sickened more than 500 people in 18 states.

Cyclospora is caused by parasites that are spread when people ingest food or water contaminated with feces. People who are exposed usually become sick after about a week and have diarrhea and other flu-like symptoms that can last from a few days to several months if untreated with antibiotics.

The outbreak in Iowa and Nebraska has been linked to salad mix served at local Olive Garden and Red Lobster restaurants that were supplied by the plant in Mexico. The cases have not been linked to the other states.

Taylor Farms has said its Mexico facility has an extensive water testing program.

"We continue to be very confident in our Mexico operation throughout our own review of our existing, and recently further enhanced, food safety procedures, systems and critical control points," the company said in a statement posted on its website.

The production halt goes beyond the implicated salad mix and includes products such as iceberg lettuce, romaine lettuce, green leaf lettuce, red cabbage, green cabbage and carrots.

"The action of Taylor Farms de Mexico exemplifies the company's cooperation with federal and state officials throughout this ongoing, complicated investigation," the FDA said in a statement on its website.

Processing facilities in California, Colorado, Texas, Tennessee, Florida, and Maryland will take over the salad mix production. Broccoli products that are not being investigated will continue to be produced at the Mexico facility, which is about 180 miles north of Mexico City in San Miguel de Allende.

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