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CPS Joins Florida industry, academia to host field tour for food safety regulators

Davis, California, March 16, 2011 - The Center for Produce Safety (CPS) at the University of California, Davis, today announced that it had joined with the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) to host a produce safety tour of Florida produce production to provide federal agencies and regulators first hand, in-depth experience and knowledge of industry current practices of how produce is safely grown, packed and handled. Tours were conducted at 15 fresh produce operations and discussions ranged from field production and harvesting practices to packing, and repacking across multiple commodities, including strawberries, blueberries, citrus, tomatoes, lettuce and leafy greens.

Members from US Food and Drug Administration and US Department of Agriculture attended as well as state food safety regulators. The tours and observations included farms with state of the art traceability and food safety systems as well as a large cash market where traceability is significantly more difficult or impossible to accomplish. The group toured from Tampa, Haines City and Plant City areas, down through Palmetto, Immokalee and Clewiston in South Florida, ending with production sites in the Belle Glade area. Presenters included operation owners and managers, as well as University of Florida faculty and food safety researchers, state agricultural association executives and local environmental experts.

"The timing of this tour was opportune, as it is very important for federal regulators involved in development of the proposed fresh produce safety regulation to have up to date information on current industry food safety best practices. FDA now faces greater pressures beyond the proposed produce safety regulation as they begin the process of implementing the provisions of the recently enacted Food Safety Modernization Act," said Dr. Martha Roberts, IFAS, who is also a member of the CPS Advisory Board. "We were pleased to provide some on-the-ground experiences showing our state's food safety and agricultural practices, and talk with them about our particular challenges and needs."

CPS Executive Director Bonnie Fernandez-Fenaroli stated, "This exchange was an opportunity to provide education and understanding of the regional and commodity differences within the produce industry. I heard many times from the participants that it was interesting to see that while the path may be different the goal of companies visited is the same, to provide safe food." Fernandez-Fenaroli continued, "We're glad to be in a position to facilitate these interactions among government, industry, research and academia."

CPS participation in the Florida tour reflects the center's priority to provide communication, outreach and training for the regulatory, industry and research communities. CPS hosted a tour in California for regulators in September 2009. CPS will hold its second annual Produce Research Symposium in Orlando, Florida, on June 28.