

***ASTA Statement on
Field and Greenhouse Planted Seeds and Human Pathogens
June 11, 2014***

Progress continues to be made to prevent contamination of fresh produce and vegetables with human food borne pathogens through the development of additional safeguards for our Nation's food supply from "the field to the dinner table." Fruits and vegetables are essential components of a healthy diet, and ASTA is in agreement that providing a safe and sound food supply, beginning with the seed, is a fundamental priority. Therefore, the seed industry continues to be vigilant by closely monitoring food safety pathogen outbreaks, evaluating and incorporating quality management systems and procedures into its seed production programs where appropriate, and monitoring ongoing research activities to help ensure that seeds do not become exposed to, or contaminated with, human pathogens.

As members of the seed industry, we believe it is important to emphasize that existing data has not shown that human pathogens are transmitted from seed planted for field or greenhouse production of fresh produce, to this produce. Therefore, the seed industry and ASTA continue to believe that there is no significant value in requiring testing of these seed lots for the presence of human pathogens and that such testing would not prevent future food illnesses emanating from produce.

Procedures used to produce seed products for planting are continuously reviewed by seed industry members as new technology is developed, and these are optimized in accordance with individual company product quality and purity management strategies. Strict quality assurance and quality control procedures are applied to all seed production, and seed must meet product quality standards to be available for sale.

Knowledge and technology gaps must be bridged in order to effectively minimize the risk of future human food borne disease outbreaks, and to improve consumer confidence in fresh produce. Therefore, ASTA continues to support science based research that prioritizes and focuses on areas of greatest exposure where human pathogens might enter the fresh produce supply chain. It is important that this research be a collaborative effort of industry, academic and regulatory groups, and that it produces the most practical and actionable impact on food handling and safety.