

## **Testimony Of Jamie Strachan**

### **House Agriculture Committee**

#### **Farm Bill Field Hearing**

**May 3, 2010**

Chairman Peterson, Ranking Member Lucas, and members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify before the House Agriculture Committee today. My name is Jamie Strachan, and I am president and CEO of Growers Express, LLC. Growers Express was founded in 1987 by eight produce growers who all believed in a few simple values: Producing our own premium quality products, consistent supply and superior service. Our owners have taken three generations of knowledge and respect for the land and have developed it into one of the nation's largest suppliers of fresh vegetables. Unlike many shippers who have grown in size but have actually reduced their own operations, the vast majority of our 15 million cartons of produce grown and shipped annually are still grown by our own owners. We still maintain the values on which our company is based. Headquartered in Salinas Valley, California, our total year-round ground base exceeds 50,000 acres. To offer our 40-plus items on a year-round basis, we also grow in Arizona, Mexico, Oregon, Michigan and Ohio. Our largest volume items- iceberg lettuce, broccoli, cauliflower, green onions, celery and leaf lettuces - are complimented with a full line of bunched items. We also offer several value-added packs to round out our line.

In addition to my role at Growers Express, I also serve as the Chairman of the California Leafy Greens Products Handler Marketing Agreement (LGMA), which is the most rigorous food safety

program for produce in the U.S. The CA LGMA is a mechanism for verifying, through mandatory government audits, that growers and handlers implement accepted Good Agricultural Practices in the growing and harvesting of lettuce, spinach and other leafy green products. In other words, the CA LGMA is protecting public health by establishing a culture of food safety on the farm, and I fully support the efforts being made in Washington to implement a similar food safety system on a national level.

The 2008 Farm Bill provided a significant allocation of funding dedicated to the specialty crop industry, and I want to thank this Committee for that allocation. The 2008 Farm bill provided my company and our industry with a set of tools necessary to enhance our competitiveness and expand our markets. While we benefit from most of the programs contained in the Farm bill, there are four that I would like to highlight today:

1. The Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Snack Program
2. The Department of Defense (DOD) Fresh Program
3. The Specialty Crop Block Grant Program
4. The Specialty Crop Research Initiative

I support the continued expansion of programs, such as the Snack Program and the DOD Fresh Program, that increase the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables. These programs will develop life-long healthy eating habits for millions of children by providing fresh fruits and vegetables in our nation's schools. In addition, these programs help address the problems our nation faces with increased rates of childhood obesity, increased healthcare costs, and poor food

quality in schools and many communities. The mandatory funding provided for the Block Grant Program helps focus on local efforts to enhance producers' ability to compete in the marketplace and provide consumers with safe, abundant food. The Specialty Crop Research Initiative helps to develop and provide the industry with science based tools to address the critical needs of the industry.

Food safety being a number one priority area for my company, coupled with the food safety reforms being discussed in Washington, I recommend that more research funds be devoted to food safety and traceability. While the leafy greens industry and others are doing all they can to raise the bar for food safety, there is a real need for more research in this area. I would encourage Congress, through the Farm Bill, to fund additional food safety-related research so that we, as growers, can do an even better job of managing risks and upgrading our practices in order to grow, harvest and ship the safest food possible. Organizations like the Center for Produce Safety and the California Leafy Greens Research Board exist to implement this type of research, and additional funding will make great strides possible in a fairly short period of time.

Lastly, I applaud the USDA for its cooperation with the Food and Drug Administration in recent months on food safety initiatives, and we encourage a continuation of this collaboration. While FDA is likely to receive broad new regulatory authority in the area of on-farm food safety, we believe that they can best carry out that mandate by working closely with USDA, the agency that knows agriculture, has experience on the inspection of farms and practices, and has an existing regulatory oversight role on the farm. In the leafy greens industry, we welcome a greater level of federal scrutiny and oversight of our practices, but we believe this can best be achieved in a collaborative manner working with both the USDA and the FDA.

## Summary

The Specialty Crop policies and programs contained in the 2008 Farm Bill generated broad industry support and have helped enhance the competitiveness of our industry as well as address critical specialty crop needs. We look forward to working with this Committee when Congress begins writing the next Farm Bill. Thank you for allowing me to testify before this Committee today.

**Jamie Strachan, CEO/ President**

Jamie Strachan joined the Growers Express in June of 2006 as General Manager. Prior to that he served a six year stint as a principle in Pacific States Asset Management where he was actively engaged as an advisor to Growers Express and other partner affiliated companies in financial and risk management matters.

Jamie has been extremely active in promoting nutritional awareness within the company, the local community, the produce industry, as well as on Capitol Hill in Washington D.C.. In addition to his tireless efforts in the nutritional arena, he has taken on a leadership role as a Vice Chairman of the Advisory Board as well as Chairman of the Executive Committee in the Leafy Greens Handler Marketing Agreement.