

WASHINGTON, Oct. 31, 2013 /PRNewswire/ -- The American Spice Trade Association (ASTA) wants American consumers to know that spices sold under reputable and trusted brands at their local grocery store are clean and safe to enjoy. U.S. consumers can continue to purchase, consume and enjoy these products with confidence.

Given the recent sensational media coverage regarding the release of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) report, "Draft Risk Profile: Pathogens and Filth in Spices," ASTA wants to assure the American public about the safety of spices sold in this country and provide context to the FDA's report.

For the draft risk profile, the FDA used sampling and testing at ports of entry into the United States and reported on its findings of pathogens and other items that naturally occur in the environment. Much of the spice presented at import has not yet been cleaned and is essentially a raw agricultural commodity. Once the spice enters the United States, it undergoes extensive cleaning, processing and treatment for pathogens to ensure it is clean and free of microbial contamination.

Data presented in the draft risk profile shows that spices are not a significant cause of foodborne illness in the United States. In fact, the FDA identified three foodborne illness outbreaks attributed to spices in the United States in the 37 year period from 1973 to 2010. This is in contrast to hundreds of such incidents during the same period that have been linked to leafy green vegetables, cantaloupes and other fresh produce.

Most spices require tropical or subtropical conditions to grow and therefore are grown in developing countries around the world where sanitation and food handling practices may not be adequate. All agricultural products, including spices, are commonly exposed to dust, dirt, insects and animal waste before they are harvested.

ASTA strongly believes that one outbreak involving spices is one too many and has provided a

wide range of resources and education for the industry to mitigate this risk. The spice industry employs a variety of equipment to physically clean spices including air separators, sifters and spiral gravity separators that separate sticks, stones and other debris from the spices. These techniques are designed to ensure finished products comply with FDA standards.

The FDA states that the intent of the report is to aid in the development of plans to reduce or prevent illness from spices contaminated by microbial pathogens and other impurities. ASTA and our members look forward to working with the FDA and other experts to achieve this goal.

The American Spice Trade Association (ASTA) has represented the interests of the American spice trade for more than 100 years and actively supports a range of programs to ensure the trade of safe and clean spice.

SOURCE The American Spice Trade Association (ASTA)