

E. coli found in water near spinach fields

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California officials say the E. coli bacterium recently discovered in U.S.-produced bags of spinach is found in nearly all Salinas Valley waterways.

The Salinas Valley is one of the world's most intensely farmed regions and a major supplier of lettuce and spinach to the United States. Officials have traced some of the contaminated bagged spinach to counties in that area.

"There are many sources of water coming into the (Salinas Valley) watershed, and I guarantee you they all have generic E. coli," and many carry the deadly E. coli strain linked with food poisonings, Christopher Rose of California's Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board told The Los Angeles Times.

Officials said the contaminated spinach has killed one person and sickened at least 145 others in 23 states.

Many creeks and streams near the region's spinach fields are known to contain 12,000 or more E. coli organisms per 100 milliliters of water -- 30 times the Environmental Protection Agency's standard, the Times said.

California officials are currently studying ways to bring the Salinas River watershed into compliance with the EPA's rules.

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