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3 California counties Probe zeroes in on

By Andrew Bridges Associated Press

contaminated with the bacteria, health officials said Wednesday. person made ill by E. coli was ound in the refrigerator of a WASHINGTON — Spinach

cer. They also were checking gun" in the case. nine farms in California's Salideadly outbreak focused on who called the bag of tainted processing plants, said Horton nas Valley, said Dr. Mark Horole baby spinach the "smoking on, the state public health offiors looking for the origin of the Federal and state investiga-

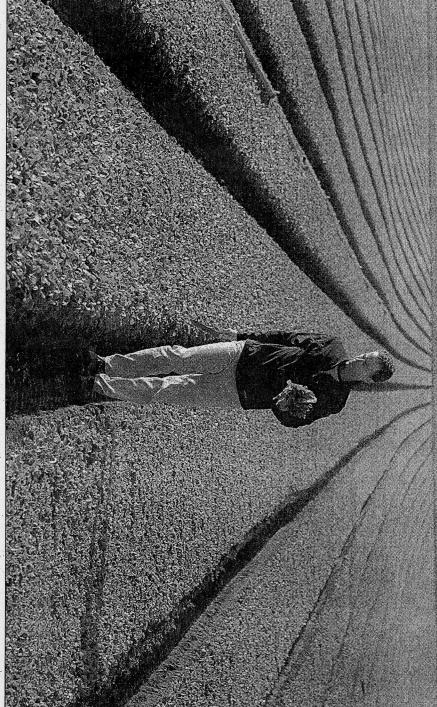
source of the bacteria as likely somewhere in Monterey, San not to eat fresh spinach. officials still urge consumers Benito or Santa Clara Counties, Despite closing in on the

trition said Wednesday. "We down to three counties," Dr. Da-California. Today we've got it want it down to a salad bowl and for Food Safety and Applied Nuvid Acheson of the Food and orug Administration's Center "Yesterday we had it down to

refrigerator in New Mexico, eventually a spinach leaf." said health officials for that The tainted bag came from a

person has died.

The spinach tested positive



Michael Dobler, a third-generation farmer near California's Salinas Valley, examines a spinach crop at one of his family's farms. Los Angeles Times photo by Al Seib

country also were being tested recovered elsewhere in the Other bags of fresh spinach

in the investigation.

side packing plants. come into contact with crops. taminated surface areas had Tuesday, seeking signs of past central sources of bacteria in-They also were looking for podooding or cases in which confarms in the Salinas Valley on Investigators began visiting

second company that has also Natural Selection Foods and a of the state's share, and it has counts for about three-quarters ach crop. The Salinas Valley accent of the nation's fresh spin-River Ranch Fresh Foods of Sarecalled fresh spinach products, been the focus of the investigaion. The area has links to both California produces 74 per-

products. and FreshPro brand spinach A third company, RLB Food Distributors of West Caldwell, has recalled Balducci's

could provide a date, they reported falling sick between Aug. Prevention. Centers for Disease Control and 19 and Sept. 5, according to the Among those victims who

printing" tests late Tuesday. State and federal officials then plicated in the outbreak. bacteria—E. coli O157:H7—immatched it to the strain of the then completed "DNA fingerthe bag of opened spinach and laboratory isolated  $E.\ coli$  from New Mexico's public health

Natural Selection, said a compa-

people in 23 states sickened. One state. A person who ate some of the greens became one of 146 said. Dole is one of the brands of for the same strain of E. coli linked to the outbreak, Acheson Juan Bautista, Calif.

ural Selection Foods LLC of San spinach recalled Friday by Nattionally grown spinach, not or-ganic—came from one of the farms that supplies spinach to The tainted greens—conven-

ny spokeswoman.