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WASHINGTON, D.C.

## Spinach processor testing for *E. coli*

Natural Selection Foods LLC, the San Juan Bautista, Calif.-based processor of fresh produce that recalled bagged fresh spinach two weeks ago, said Thursday that it is testing spinach in the field for *E. coli*.

Since early September, 187 people in 26 states have become ill from fresh spinach contami-

nated with a deadly strain of the *E. coli* bacteria. At least one woman has died.

The tainted spinach has been traced to 12 fields on nine farms in California's Salinas Valley that supplied spinach to Natural Selection. The company washes and packs spinach for 30 brands, including Safeway's O Organics, Dole and Ready Pac.

Company officials said Thursday they were "confident" the outbreak did not originate at their facilities. However, state officials declined to rule out a Natural Selection plant as a source of contamination.

"As of today, we have not cleared the processing facilities in this investigation," said Kevin Reilly of the California Department of Health Services.