

E. coli found in cattle feces in spinach probe

SAN FRANCISCO (Reuters) - California officials have discovered E. coli in cattle feces on pastures near farms being investigated as possible sources of spinach contaminated with the bacteria, which caused a nationwide outbreak of food poisoning, a state health officer said on Tuesday.

State investigators have obtained eight samples of cattle feces testing positive for E. coli. The samples are being retested to see if their bacteria strain matches the strain in 193 cases of food poisoning, including one confirmed fatality last month, linked to tainted spinach, said Kevin Reilly, a deputy director at the California Department of Health Services.

"We probably won't have results for another couple of days," Reilly told reporters in a telephone conference call.

California investigators are looking into a number of scenarios for how spinach from their state may have become contaminated with E. coli, Reilly said.

The outbreak has been traced to spinach processed in California.

The bacteria could have been transmitted by irrigation water, fertilizer, farm equipment or workers, livestock and wild animals, or it could have contaminated the spinach inside processing plants, during transport or on store shelves.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration said on Friday that fresh spinach is safe to eat in the United States because all E. coli-tainted spinach had been recalled.