

Lawmaker can't find spinach in stores

SALINAS, California (AP) — A congressman who tried to stage a public spinach-eating news conference to demonstrate that the leafy greens are safe following a nationwide E. coli outbreak scrapped his plan after he could not find any in local grocery stores.

Rep. Sam Farr had wanted to try to persuade consumers it is safe again to eat spinach from the Salinas Valley, which was the source of contaminated spinach that sickened 187 people in 26 states.

"The good news is that spinach is able to be sold in the markets," Farr said. "The bad news is the markets aren't selling it. One of the efforts that we talked about is how do we regain consumer confidence."

On Friday, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration lifted its 2-week-old consumer warning on most fresh spinach. But spinach and spinach-containing products that were recalled by San Juan Bautista-based Natural Selection Foods LLC and four companies it supplied remained subject to the FDA alert Tuesday.

Farr made his remarks in front of an empty bowl that he had hoped to fill with spinach. He had intended to eat some and feed it to reporters, but said his attempts to buy spinach at two local grocery stores were unsuccessful. Both stores had signs that said they were not selling spinach, according to a Farr aide.

Dave Heylen, a spokesman for the California Grocers Association, said some stores have started restocking their spinach bins while others have not, either because they have not been able to get hold of any or are waiting to see if shoppers are interested.