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**TOMATOES RETURN TO STORES AND MENUS AS CALIFORNIA BEGINS HARVEST**

**Fresno, CA** – Just in time for the start of tomato harvest in major California production areas, restaurants and grocery stores are announcing the return of tomatoes to store shelves and menus. The move comes in light of announcements from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration clearing most U.S. tomato producing areas because tomatoes from these areas are not associated with the recent salmonella outbreak (<http://www.fda.gov/oc/opacom/hottopics/tomatoes.html>).

“We understand the caution exercised by some restaurants and stores who may have stopped carrying tomatoes in light of the outbreak,” said Ed Beckman, president of California Tomato Farmers, a cooperative representing approximately 80 percent of the fresh tomatoes produced in California. “However, now that government agencies have clearly removed all concern about tomatoes produced in California and several other states, we see no reason for restaurants and stores not to resume carrying tomatoes. We are encouraged by those who are doing so.”

Examples of chains who are returning tomatoes to their menus include: Jack in the Box, who was the first major chain to return tomatoes to the menu following the FDA clearance; and Subway, a major user of California-grown tomatoes. Beckman was also quick to point out major Canadian operations, like A&W and Tim Horton’s, have also resumed serving tomatoes.

“We have fully returned to purchasing tomatoes for our customers in the U.S. and Canada and also have resumed offering our own Markon *First Crop* label tomatoes because of our confidence in the producers who supply these tomatoes,” said Tim York, president of Markon, one of the nation’s largest foodservice distributors.

The move by chains to return or continue featuring tomatoes comes just in time for the beginning of fresh tomato harvest in the major production regions of California’s San Joaquin Valley. Members of California Tomato Farmers produce tomatoes from San Diego County in the south to Sacramento County in the north. Beckman stated that California is the second leading producer of fresh tomatoes behind Florida and that the value of the California tomato crop is approximately 400 million dollars.

“The value of the tomato crop does not take into account the contribution of the California tomato industry to the state’s economy,” he continued. “A disruption in harvest of tomatoes would significantly impact the California economy.”

To further encourage consumption and address the issue of consumer confusion, California Tomato Farmers is offering to its customers reproducible templates for in-store point of sale materials and signage so that retailers and restaurants can let consumers the tomatoes they see on shelves and menus are from California.

“The signs are very consumer friendly,” said Beckman. “They simply state product origin so that consumers who have heard California tomatoes are now cleared can be assured of the safety of the tomatoes they eat.”

“Members of California Tomato Farmers have a long-time commitment to ensuring the field-grown tomatoes we produce are always safe to eat and we have made food safety a top priority,” explained Beckman, adding that California Tomato Farmers is owned by the family farms who produce tomatoes for the following companies: Ace Tomato Company, DiMare Company, Gargiulo, Harry Singh & Sons/Oceanside Produce, Live Oak Farms, Pacific/Triple E Produce, HS Packing and San Joaquin Tomato Growers.

Beckman pointed to a stringent food safety program which has been adopted by California Tomato Farmers requiring adherence to mandatory standards verified by government inspection. He explained that California Tomato Farmers food safety protocols, known as “The Fresh Standard,” are based on guidelines developed in conjunction with FDA, food safety scientists, representatives of the produce buying trade and other U.S. tomato growing regions.

“As a condition of membership, California Tomato Farmers members are required to adhere to *The Fresh Standard* for food safety,” he explained. “All operations are audited by California Department of Food and Agriculture inspectors under the authority of the U.S. Department of Agriculture to verify farming and packing practices are in compliance. Under the program, member companies are subject to multiple USDA audits of fields and packing sheds to verify the standards are being met. The audits are conducted on a random basis and include unannounced visits.

“To our knowledge, members of California Tomato Farmers are the only California tomato producers who are subjecting themselves to mandatory government audit,” said Beckman.

More detailed information on the California Tomato Farmers food safety program is available on their website at [www.californiatomatofarmers.com](http://www.californiatomatofarmers.com). Downloadable templates for POS materials are also available under a password protected section of the site or can be accessed by calling California Tomato Farmers at (559) 261-2630.

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