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Liz Compton

(850) 488-3022

BRONSON ANNOUNCES FLORIDA TOMATOES DEEMED SAFE BY FDA

TALLAHASSEE—Florida Agriculture and Consumer Services Commissioner Charles H. Bronson has announced that tomatoes currently being harvested in Florida have been deemed safe by the Food and Drug Administration and has been added to the agency's list of states with "safe to eat" tomatoes. FDA's website is updated in the evening and will reflect the change.

"Florida tomato growers have one of the most stringent tomato production programs in the nation. They initiated the heightened safety standards several years ago to ensure public confidence in their product."

After reviewing Florida's safety initiative, the timing of the illness outbreak and the timing of tomato harvesting, FDA added Florida's current production areas to the "safe to eat" list. Growers will provide a certificate with each shipment verifying the tomatoes are from Florida. Bronson points out that the tomatoes that are now being harvested and shipped from Florida did not even exist when the salmonella outbreak occurred. He says Florida growers sell an abundance of their product in Florida and there have been no reported illness in the state. Florida growers also sell predominantly to eastern states and the bulk of illnesses have occurred in western states.

"It is critical that consumers know that our tomatoes are safe and delicious," Bronson said. "Our growers have worked hard to ensure the utmost safety of their product."

Currently, tomato harvesting is underway in three areas of the state, Quincy near Tallahassee and Ruskin and Palmetto near the Tampa area. Growers have already had truckloads of tomatoes turned away by retailers concerned about the salmonella outbreak that has impacted mostly western states. Retailers are being notified of Florida's addition to the "safe to eat" list and its hoped Florida tomatoes will be back on store shelves immediately and enjoyed by all.

In 2006-2007, Florida tomato industry had \$464 million in cash receipts. They have an estimated direct and indirect economic value of \$1.1 Billion in Total Direct and Indirect economic impact, provide over 15,700 jobs and contribute \$58 million dollars indirectly to local and state tax revenue streams.

