



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – June 7, 2007

## **NATIONAL WATERMELON PROMOTION BOARD EXPANDS CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAM**

No commodity wants to face a crisis, but every commodity needs to be prepared. In response to the increasing incidence of food borne illness and other crises, the National Watermelon Promotion Board (NWPB) Board of Directors has directed the staff to place greater emphasis on crisis preparation.

The decision was made at the spring Board of Directors meeting held in Asheville, N.C., in late February 2007. “While we’ve had an active crisis communications program in place since 2000, our Board wanted to be confident that the watermelon industry is prepared. Our new program covers many more areas and includes action items for staff, the Board of Directors, and industry members as well,” said Mark Arney, NWPB executive director.

Efforts are underway to enhance the program and will continue throughout the year. The program will be continually updated and enhanced to keep up to date with crisis-related issues and to ensure preparedness. The new NWPB crisis communications program includes:

- Enhancing the plan, including adding more third-party experts, a check list, and more scenario-based statements
- Adding an #800 telephone number for 24/7 contact with NWPB staff in case of crisis
- Developing a crisis readiness page for the web site that can go live if necessary
- Placing food safety resource links in the industry portion of the web site
- Adding video messaging capability to the web site
- Conducting crisis training sessions for all NWPB Board Members and staff
- Developing safe food handling information sent out in the NWPB press kit and retail kit
- Developing safe food handling flyers for consumers
- Conducting safe food handling training during the queen training seminar and NWPB merchandising representative seminar
- Adding food safety issue questions to NWPB consumer research program
- Attending food safety seminars and industry meetings
- Developing crisis information tip cards and information for industry members

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In addition, NWPB staff is working closely with the National Watermelon Association (NWA) as they lead in developing a program that will focus on the following key initiatives and food safety topics:

- Develop a program that promotes Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification through the USDA & State inspectors
- Create educational and bilingual materials to inform migrant laborers of the proper product handling procedures and good personal hygiene
- Share recommended steps in case of Immigration and Border Security inspections
- Add NWPB and NWA food safety initiatives to NWA web site for member review
- Attend, participate in and monitor food safety initiatives in Washington
- Collaborate with United Fresh Produce Association (UFPA), Produce Marketing Association (PMA) and Western Growers Association (WGA)
- Educate the industry through conventions and farmer meetings, mailings and the NWA web site
- Be a resource to the industry to support GAP certification and a focus on food safety at farm and packing house levels
- Serve as a resource and consultant to the NWPB crisis team

The National Watermelon Promotion Board, based in Orlando, FL. represents 1,500 growers, shippers and importers. Through research, communication and marketing initiatives, the Board is finding new ways to enhance market opportunities for farmers and to promote the nutritional, culinary and convenience benefits of watermelon. Our goal is to support and expand existing markets, develop new markets and facilitate the production of watermelons. For additional information on watermelon, please visit our web site at [www.watermelon.org](http://www.watermelon.org), or contact Leslie Coleman, NWPB director of communications, at [lcoleman@watermelon.org](mailto:lcoleman@watermelon.org) or at 407-657-0261.

Visuals of the crisis communications card, consumer food safety card and a photo of the Board member training seminar are available upon request.

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