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FEDS INVESTIGATE CHIPOTLE, STOP FOODBORNE ILLNESS RESPONDS

***Due to Consumer Pressures, Food Companies Are Making Needed
Change Much Sooner Than in the Past***

Chicago, Ill - Jan. 8, 2016 - For a restaurant chain that started the same year as the 1993 “Jack in the Box” *E.coli* outbreak, Chipotle Mexican Grill should have learned a lesson or two about being more proactive in the prevention of foodborne illnesses. The chain, with over 1,900 stores in North America and the UK, is now under investigation by the FDA and the U.S. Attorney’s office for its own series of food safety crises. To date, Chipotle has been tied to five outbreaks in 2015:

- *E.coli* O157:H7 in Seattle, WA, that sickened at least five customers
- Norovirus in Simi Valley, CA, that sickened at least 200 customers
- *Salmonella* Newport in Minnesota that sickened at least 64 customers
- A multi-state *E. coli* O26 outbreak (CA, IL, MD, MN, NY, OH, OR, PA, WA) that sickened at least 52 customers
- Norovirus in Boston, MA, that sickened at least 136 customers

Reports from Chipotle confirm that the company is under an FDA and U.S Attorney criminal investigation in connection with the Simi Valley, California Norovirus outbreak. “What stands out about this federal investigation into Chipotle Mexican Grill is that, while the FDA has taken legal action against food companies in the past, the federal government does not have a history of taking legal action against restaurants,” states Darin Detwiler, senior policy coordinator for STOP Foodborne Illness.

Historically, food companies have changed their food safety policies and procedures long after a crisis. “Whereas changes rarely took place as a result of pressure from consumer expectations or even political development, change came only after the impact of legislation,

litigation, or regulation” says Detwiler. “Today, the Chipotle case can be seen as an example of food companies making needed change much sooner than in the past by pressures earlier, after or even during a crisis. This change of heart towards food safety by Chipotle appears to be driven by a large and growing population of vocal stakeholders in the food industry – consumers!”

Chipotle’s stock value declined by 43% in the fourth quarter of 2015 and their December sales figures dropping almost 30% were not caused by legal injunctions or FDA recalls, but to the change in purchasing decisions of their ‘loyal customer base.’ Consumers who, based on learning of all the outbreaks tied to Chipotle, voted with their dollars. They sent a strong disapproval of the company’s failure to prevent foodborne illness by impacting Chipotle economically.

The food industry, especially the retail and restaurant side, is now forced to consider the fact that today, more than ever before, consumers will play an ever increasing and significant role as stakeholders. Detwiler holds hope that the potential positive result may be a more proactive approach to enacting and enforcing food safety policies and safer food.

STOP Foodborne Illness is a national nonprofit, public health organization dedicated to the prevention of illness and death from foodborne pathogens.

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About STOP Foodborne Illness, www.stopfoodborneillness.org

STOP Foodborne Illness (STOP) is a national, nonprofit, public health organization dedicated to preventing illness and death from foodborne pathogens. STOP Foodborne Illness achieves its mission by advocating for sound public policies, building public awareness and assisting those impacted by foodborne illness.

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