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California Cantaloupe Board Adds Consumer Sweepstakes To Ongoing Food Safety Program

Dinuba, CA -- Beginning today, cantaloupe lovers everywhere will have a chance to win free groceries. The offer is part of the California Cantaloupe Advisory Board's [Summertime Yum & Cantaloupe Fun](#) on-line sweepstakes promotion designed to draw more people to the organization's website and social media properties.

Last year the California cantaloupe industry established a new mandatory food safety program and launched an on-line education effort designed to increase confidence and boost consumption of California cantaloupes. The educational campaign is being partially funded through a USDA Block Grant provided to the Cantaloupe Board to help rebuild confidence in cantaloupe in the aftermath of the 2011 outbreak of listeria associated with cantaloupe from Jensen Farms.

"California cantaloupe farmers have such a great story to tell in the way we have utilized 20 years of University research to determine the safest ways to grow cantaloupes," said Garrett Patricio, Chairman of the California Cantaloupe Advisory Board's Marketing Committee. "Our new [website](#) and social marketing campaign are designed not only to tell consumers the story of our commitment to producing the best quality and safest cantaloupe, but we hope to encourage increased consumption of cantaloupe by engaging people in all the fun and delicious ways cantaloupe can be incorporated into a healthy diet."

The *Summertime Yum and Cantaloupe Fun* promotion is tied to the California Cantaloupe [Facebook](#) page where consumers are encouraged to explain how and why they are fans of fresh cantaloupe. Consumers can enter to win a \$100 gift certificate to their favorite local grocery store. Prizes will be given three times over the course of the next two months.

The California Cantaloupe Advisory Board has a team of social media experts who are implementing the program and regularly sharing information via a host of social media sites including [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [Pinterest](#) and [Google+](#) in addition to Facebook. A series of videos is also available on [YouTube](#) with information on the California cantaloupe industry's mandatory food safety program, as well as some quick consumer tips on how to safely wash, select, cut and store cantaloupe.

For those interested in the details of the food safety program, a list of [certified shippers](#) is posted on the website and a copy of the [food safety audit checklist](#), which includes 156 checkpoints, is also available. Last year, the Board launched the first mandatory food safety program in the U.S. produce industry that invites government auditors to inspect all aspects of cantaloupe production operations. Handlers who are certified under the program are required to be in 100 percent compliance with a set of science-based food safety practices verified by government auditors. The program operates with oversight from the California Department of Food and Agriculture and utilized USDA-trained auditors.

During the first year of the program, 53 total audits were conducted with each including 156 food safety checkpoints. In total, after examining 8,268 checkpoints in fields, packing facilities and coolers, government auditors found 4.3% that were out of compliance. All checkpoints are required to be corrected and verified again by auditors. Once a handler has achieved full compliance with all checkpoints they are considered "certified." Only then can handlers utilize the certified seal on packaging and paperwork and the name of their company is posted on the public website.

"We are very pleased that all handlers achieved certification last year," said Patricio, noting that this season's audits are currently ongoing and that any new handlers will be added to the certified list as soon as their audits are complete. He encouraged retail and foodservice buyers to visit the website to ensure they are purchasing cantaloupe from certified handlers. "They should also visit our [website](#) and sign up to receive our newsletter so they can be notified if there are any de-certifications."

Patricio also urged retailers to share the California cantaloupe website and social media sites with their customers. "Our Board is very fortunate to be able to promote all of the fun and delicious ways to use and eat cantaloupe along with telling people about our strong food safety program," he said. "Cantaloupes are such a great product and we are very confident that more people will become fans once they get to know us."

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