

Statement from Foodborne Illness Victim Geoff Soza

On Nov. 6, Geoff Soza gave a statement before the California Department of Food & Agriculture about his experience contracting hepatitis A from contaminated berry mix in 2013.

My name is Geoff Soza, and I am from Encinitas, California. Instead of celebrating my 30th wedding anniversary in Yellowstone National Park in 2013, I lay in a 30-bed hospital in Jackson, Wyoming, having contracted a nearly fatal case of hepatitis A. The organic frozen berry mix that I had been eating for a healthy breakfast every day for months was contaminated with this virulent virus.

On my second day in the hospital, my wife emailed our daughter: “Gagging, retching, burning to the touch, aching and lacking even the energy to sit up. He lay lifeless on the hospital bed, his face and eyes bright yellow. He has refused to eat for 48 hours.” What followed were days of uncertainty—whether I would have my gallbladder removed, whether I would be flown to Salt Lake City for a liver transplant. Despite my debilitated state, I understood the graveness of the situation and feared the worst. “We can only provide a couple of medications, most of which will not be absorbed by his body. The rest is going to be up to him,” my doctor explained.

After a roller coaster of enzyme readings and days in the hospital, I was able to return home. It was only after two months of recovery that I was able to work, but just part time. It wasn’t until four months after my hospitalization that I truly began to feel as though I was healthy again.

I have experienced firsthand the real meaning of “food poisoning.” My body truly felt as though I had been poisoned. I do not want anyone else to have to go through what I did. For this reason, I urge FDA to finalize strong food safety regulations as soon as possible. I also want it to ensure that any exemptions from these requirements are as narrow as possible in order to maximize their public health protection. Additionally, there must be severe consequences for food safety failures. If a processor loses its exemption for putting the public health in jeopardy, there should be no opportunity for reinstatement.

I deeply regret that my wife and I missed the one opportunity we had to commemorate our 30th anniversary. I am grateful, however, to be alive and to have the opportunity to celebrate many more years with her. The precious time we have with our families should not be put at risk because of safety gaps in our food supply.