

Chipotle's troubles raise doubts about 'fresh and local' strategy

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The E. coli outbreak linked to Chipotle Mexican Grill Inc. has sickened at least 52 people in nine states. And pinpointing the source of the contamination hasn't been easy. Unlike the big burger-and-fries chains that deal with a handful of beef and potato suppliers and distributors, Chipotle depends on a more complex supply chain for its 1,900 outlets that includes scores of small, independent farmers. That can lead to ingredient shortages and questions about food safety. . .

When Chipotle can't deliver on its healthy and fresh promise, its greatest strength can turn into its biggest weakness. In the latest sign of trouble, Chipotle temporarily closed a restaurant in Boston on Monday after several Boston College students, including members of the men's basketball team, reported getting sick after eating there. In that case, health officials are leaning toward norovirus as the culprit, not E. coli, Chipotle said. . .

Now in the wake of the E. coli cases, Chipotle is tightening its supplier standards and re-evaluating its local produce program, which dates back to 2008. The pullback hits at the heart of Chipotle's culture and marketing, which has touted its support of sustainable agriculture.

It's been a rough few months for Chipotle. In July, a smaller E. coli outbreak occurred in Washington, sickening five people, though it was never reported by local authorities. Also over the summer, a norovirus outbreak at a Chipotle in California left about 200 ill. And in September, salmonella infected dozens of Chipotle customers in Minnesota. In that case, tainted tomatoes were to blame.

Read full, original post: [Chipotle's Biggest Strength Is Suddenly Its Biggest Weakness](#)