

Spain: Germany weighing EU aid to Spanish farmers

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(AP) -- Germany is considering pushing for EU compensation for Spanish farmers after it erroneously blamed its vegetable produce for starting the E. coli outbreak that has killed 18 people, says Spain.

In a website note posted late Thursday, the Spanish government said Chancellor Angela Merkel had told Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero that she regretted the damage caused, but explained that Hamburg authorities who cited Spanish [cucumbers](#) as a suspected source of the outbreak had acted in accordance with German law.

The German allegation led to a virtual freezing of exports of Spanish fruit and vegetables, causing major financial losses for the country's farmers, although no figure has been given yet.

On Tuesday, German authorities admitted that although E. coli was found on the vegetables it was of a strain different to that which led to the deaths. Hundreds of other people have also been sickened by the outbreak across Europe.

In Berlin, Merkel's spokesman said the German leader had expressed her "understanding" of concerns about the E. coli outbreak's effect on Spanish agriculture.

Steffen Seibert said the two leaders agreed to remain in close contact and work together with the [European Union](#) to try and weather the crisis.

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