

Stiff sentences over US salmonella outbreak

September 22 2015

Three people convicted over a nationwide salmonella outbreak were sentenced Monday to tough sentences of up to 28 years in prison, the US Justice Department said.

Two ex-officials of and a broker for the Peanut Corporation of America (PCA) were jailed in Albany, in the US state of Georgia, for their roles in a conspiracy to defraud consumers about peanut health risks.

Expert evidence at their trial showed tainted [food](#) led to a salmonella outbreak in 2009. More than 700 reported cases of salmonella poisoning in 46 states resulted.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), based on epidemiological projections, that number translates to more than 22,000 total cases—including nine deaths.

They sought to deceive "their customers by shipping salmonella-positive peanut products before the results of microbiological testing were received and falsifying microbiological test results," a [justice department](#) statement said.

Stewart Parnell, 61, the ex-owner and president of PCA, was sentenced to 336 months, or 28 years, in prison plus three years of supervised release.

Michael Parnell, 56, a food broker who worked on behalf of PCA and Stewart Parnell's brother, was sentenced to 20 years plus three years of

supervised release.

Mary Wilkerson, 41, who held various positions at PCA's Blakely, Georgia plant, including receptionist, office manager and quality assurance manager, was sentenced to five years.

"Americans should be able to trust that the food we buy for ourselves and our families is safe," said Acting Associate Attorney General Stuart Delery.

"Today's sentencing sends a powerful message to officials in the food industry that they stand in a special position of trust with the American consumer, and those who put profit above the welfare of their customers and knowingly sell contaminated food will face serious consequences," said Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Benjamin Mizer, head of the Justice Department's Civil Division.

The Parnell brothers were convicted by a federal jury in September last year of multiple counts of conspiracy, mail and wire fraud and the sale of misbranded food, among other convictions.

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