



Food and Drug Administration Office of Criminal Investigations

U.S. Department of Justice Press Release

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**United States Department of
Justice**

Two former officials of the Peanut Corporation of America (PCA) were sentenced to prison today in Albany, Georgia, for their roles in a conspiracy to defraud their customers by shipping salmonella-positive peanut products before the results of microbiological testing were received and falsifying microbiological test results, the Department of Justice announced today. Last week, PCA's former president received 28 years in prison, the largest criminal sentence ever given in a food safety case.

Samuel Lightsey, 50, of Blakely, Georgia, a former operations manager at PCA's Blakely plant, was sentenced by Senior U.S. District Court Judge W. Louis Sands of the Middle District of Georgia to serve 36 months in prison to be followed by three years of supervised release. Daniel Kilgore, 46, also of Blakely, and a former operations manager at PCA's Blakely plant, was sentenced to serve 72 months in prison to be followed by three years of supervised release.

Both Lightsey and Kilgore pleaded guilty to conspiracy, mail and wire fraud, and the sale of misbranded and adulterated food. Additionally, both Lightsey and Kilgore served as witnesses in the 2014 trial of Stewart Parnell, 61, of Lynchburg, Virginia, the former owner and president of PCA; Michael Parnell, 56, of Midlothian, Virginia, Stewart Parnell's brother, who worked at P.P. Sales and was a food broker who worked on behalf of PCA; and Mary Wilkerson, 41, of Edison, Georgia, who held various positions at PCA's Blakely plant, including receptionist, office manager and quality assurance manager. Lightsey was on the witness stand during nine trial days and Kilgore testified as a witness during five trial days.

The trial, which led to the convictions of Stewart Parnell, Michael Parnell and Mary Wilkerson, established that tainted food led to a salmonella outbreak in 2009 with more than 700 reported cases of salmonella poisoning in 46 states. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, based on epidemiological projections, that number translates to more than 22,000 total cases, including nine deaths. During the sentencing phase of the case, the court found that the evidence presented at trial linked PCA's contaminated peanut products to the victims' illnesses.

“Today’s sentences are a just result,” said Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Benjamin C. Mizer, head of the Justice Department’s Civil Division. “They reflect the roles that the defendants played in these terrible acts, their acceptance of responsibility for those roles, and their willingness to assist the government, albeit after the fact, in ensuring that all of those who engaged in criminal activity were held accountable. The Department of Justice will continue to work aggressively with its partners to ensure that the American people are protected from food that is adulterated or misbranded.”

The government presented evidence at trial to establish that Stewart Parnell and Michael Parnell, with Lightsey and Kilgore, participated in several schemes by which they defrauded PCA customers and jeopardized the quality and purity of their peanut products. Specifically, the government presented evidence that the defendants misled customers about the presence of salmonella in their products. For example, the Parnells, Lightsey and Kilgore fabricated certificates of analysis (COAs) that accompanied various shipments of peanut products. COAs are documents that summarize laboratory results, including test results concerning the presence or absence of pathogens in food. According to the evidence, on several occasions, the Parnells, Lightsey and Kilgore participated in a scheme to fabricate COAs that stated that the food at issue was free of pathogens when in fact there had been no testing of the food or tests had revealed the presence of pathogens.

The government also presented evidence that demonstrated that when the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) officials visited PCA’s Blakely plant to investigate the outbreak, Stewart Parnell, Lightsey and Wilkerson gave untrue or misleading answers to questions posed by those officials.

“By making sure that the individuals involved in the corporate fraud at PCA were held accountable, I am confident that the message to other executives is clear,” said U.S. Attorney Michael J. Moore of the Middle District of Georgia. “Because we all know that it is people who make decisions about what goes on behind the corporate curtain, we’ll be looking to hold those individuals personally accountable when they steer their businesses down the path of fraud. Mr. Kilgore and Mr. Lightsey acknowledged their wrongdoing, and today their sentences reflect not only their acceptance of that responsibility, but also the requirement of accountability.”

“Today’s sentencing in federal court will afford these defendants, former corporate officers at Peanut Corporation of America, plenty of time to reflect on their roles in the fatal 2009 salmonella outbreak as a result of their criminal conduct,” said Special Agent in Charge J. Britt Johnson of the FBI Atlanta Field Office. “It is the FBI’s hope that this will provide some solace to the families of those that died and the many more that suffered as a result of this outbreak.”

On Sept. 21, Judge Sands sentenced Stewart Parnell to serve 336 months in prison to be followed by three years of supervised release, Michael Parnell to serve 240 months in prison to be followed by three years of supervised release and Mary Wilkerson to serve 60 months in prison to be followed by two years of supervised release.

The case was prosecuted by Trial Attorneys Patrick Hearn and Mary M. Englehart of the Civil Division's Consumer Protection Branch and Assistant U.S. Attorney Alan Dasher of the Middle District of Georgia. Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Mizer and U.S. Attorney Moore thank the investigative efforts of the FBI and the FDA's Office of Criminal Investigations.

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Civil Division

Consumer Protection