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PORTALES, N.M. (AP) — The New Mexico peanut butter plant linked to a salmonella outbreak remains idle as officials wait for federal approval to reopen.

Sunland Inc. spokeswoman Katalin Coburn declined Monday to estimate when operations at the country's largest organic peanut processing plant may resume, saying only that officials are awaiting a response from the Food and Drug Administration.

Sunland shuttered its operations in Portales and began a top-to-bottom scrubbing in late September after salmonella was found in peanut butter it made for Trader Joe's. The company then issued a voluntary recall of hundreds of products. Forty-one illnesses in 20 states have been linked to the peanut butter.

The shutdown comes amid a bumper harvest of eastern New Mexico's prized Valencia peanuts. Coburn said the peanuts are being stored for processing when the plant reopens.

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