

Wal-Mart Settles With Cantaloupe Listeria Victims

(AP) Wal-Mart has announced that the company has agreed to settle claims from many of the families of victims who died in a 2011 listeria outbreak that killed 33 people and was traced to a Colorado cantaloupe farm. The company, based in Bentonville, Arkansas, settled with 23 families, including nine in Colorado, said Bill Marler, the families' attorney. The terms of the settlements were kept confidential.

Wal-Mart spokesman Randy Hargrove said the company is "committed to our customers' safety and we take food safety concerns like this very seriously." Hargrove said Wal-Mart stores in Colorado and other states removed the contaminated cantaloupe from the produce department as soon as the company learned of the outbreak, but some relatives said the company did not react fast enough.

Two Colorado cantaloupe farmers pleaded guilty to misdemeanor charges stemming from the deadly outbreak and were sentenced to five years of probation and six months of home detention. A federal magistrate also ordered brothers Eric and Ryan Jensen to each pay \$150,000 in restitution and perform 100 hours of community service. They pleaded guilty last year to introducing adulterated food into interstate commerce.

According to federal regulators, conditions at Jensen Farms caused the outbreak. Investigators said the melons likely were contaminated in the farm's packing house because of dirty water on the floor and old, hard-to-clean equipment. About one week before Colorado officials detected the outbreak's first victim, an inspector sent by farm inspection company Primus Labs gave the melon farm a 96 percent "superior" rating,

Jensen Farms, a fourth-generation farm in southeastern Colorado, filed for bankruptcy within a year of the outbreak, and lawsuits against the farm were resolved through bankruptcy court. Marler's law firm has filed lawsuits on behalf of 44 families, representing 28 who died and 17 who were sickened but survived, against multiple defendants in 12 states. Medical expenses from those cases total more than \$12 million, Marler said.

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