

Calif. Co-Owner Pleads Guilty to Processing Cows With Cancer With Cancer

Associated Press



Cows wait to be butchered at a Rancho slaughterhouse in Petaluma, Calif. Rancho Feeding halted operations in February after a series of recalls, and four men have been charged with carrying out a scheme to process meat from diseased cattle. (Associated Press)

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — The co-owner of a Northern California slaughterhouse accused of processing cows with cancer while U.S. livestock inspectors took lunch breaks has pleaded guilty to a federal criminal charge.

Robert Singleton, who co-owns the Petaluma-based Rancho Feeding Corp., entered his plea Friday in a San Francisco courtroom to aiding and abetting in the distribution of adulterated, misbranded and uninspected meat, the [San Francisco Chronicle](#) [1] reported.

Singleton, 77, is free on \$50,000 bail. He has signed an agreement requiring him to work with prosecutors who have filed charges against the company's other owner, Jesse Amaral Jr., and two employees, Eugene Corda and Felix Cabrera.

Those three have pleaded not guilty.

But by admitting guilt, Singleton "accepts full responsibility for his conduct," his attorney Pamela Davis said. "He acknowledges the harm he's caused to the community."

Prosecutors alleged that the owners schemed with employees to slaughter about 79 cows with skin cancer of the eye rather than stopping plant operations while inspectors took lunch breaks. Then, the government alleges, plant workers swapped the heads of diseased cattle with heads of healthy cows to hide them from

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inspectors.

Operations were halted in February after a series of recalls, including one for 8.7 million pounds of beef. The meat was sold at Walmart and other national chains and used in products, including Hot Pockets.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has said Rancho processed diseased and unhealthy animals and circumvented federal inspection rules.

There have been no reports of illnesses linked to the products, which were processed from Jan. 1, 2013, through Jan. 7, 2014, and shipped to distribution centers and retail stores in California, Florida, Illinois and Texas.

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