

21 Million Pound Beef Recall Forces Company Out of Business

ELIZABETH, New Jersey, October 5, 2007(ENS) - A 67 year old company that manufactured hamburgers for its own brand and some of the largest private label brands on the market has been forced to recall so much meat that it is going out of business.

Topps Meat Company LLC announced today that because of the economic impact of the second-largest beef recall in U.S. history involving more than 21.7 million pounds of ground beef products, it is forced to close its Elizabeth plant and go out of business effective today. The company has been in business since 1940.

The tons of frozen ground beef products were recalled because they may be contaminated with E. coli O157:H7, says the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service, FSIS.

"This is tragic for all concerned," said Anthony D'Urso, Topps chief operating officer. "In one week we have gone from the largest U.S. manufacturer of frozen hamburgers to a company that cannot overcome the economic reality of a recall this large."

"We sincerely regret the impact this will have on our employees, our customers and suppliers, and the community. Most of all, we regret that our products have been linked by public health agencies to recently reported illnesses," he said. "We hope and pray for the full recovery of those individuals."

D'Urso said, "Topps has always prided itself on providing the utmost quality and safety and never had a recall in our history until now. This has been a shocking and sobering experience for everyone."

E. coli O157:H7 is a potentially deadly bacterium that can cause bloody diarrhea and dehydration. The very young, seniors and persons with compromised immune systems are the most susceptible to foodborne illness.

There are currently 25 illnesses under investigation in Connecticut, Florida, Indiana, Maine, New Jersey, New York, Ohio and Pennsylvania. An investigation carried out by the New York Department of Health in coordination with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, preceded the first recall on September 25. The recall was expanded on September 29.

The frozen ground beef products were produced on various dates between September 25, 2006, and September 25, 2007, and were distributed to food service institutions in the New York metropolitan area and to retail establishments nationwide.

They bear the brand names: Butcher's Best, Kohler Foods, Mike's, Pathmark, Rastelli's, Roma - Topps, Sam's Choice Backyard Gourmet, Sand Castle, Shop-Rite, Topps, West Side, and Westside.

Each package bears the establishment number "Est. 9748" inside the USDA mark of inspection as well as a sell-by date between "SEP 25 07" and "SEP 25 08."

Federal food safety officials say frozen products still out there with an unexpired sell-by date are subject to the recall expansion. "It is important that consumers look for the recalled products and return them if found in their freezers," says the FSIS.

Consumers, retailers and distributors with questions about the recall should contact the company's recall line at 888-734-0451.

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