



San Diego City Attorney Jan I. Goldsmith

NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: [Gerry Braun](mailto:gbraun@sandiego.gov), Director of Communications: gbraun@sandiego.gov (619) 533-4782

201,000 Eggs Going to Local Food Banks

Settlement in City Attorney's consumer-protection case benefits needy San Diego families

A company that misled consumers to think its eggs were California products is settling a consumer-protection lawsuit filed by the City Attorney's Office by donating \$50,000 worth of eggs to two San Diego food banks.

Luberski, Inc., which operates under the brand name Hidden Villa Ranch, will also pay \$53,517 in penalties and investigation costs to resolve the allegations of mislabeling statements on its egg packages.

Through the settlement, the eggs -- 201,240 in all -- are being distributed to needy San Diego families and food programs by Feeding America San Diego and the Jacobs & Cushman San Diego Food Bank.

An investigation by the city Attorney's Office found that Hidden Villa Ranch eggs, which were purchased locally at Costco stores, had been labeled "California Ranch Fresh" and "A Product of Hidden Villa Ranch, Fullerton CA" even though they were produced at out-of-state egg plants.

Laws requiring honest food labeling protects more than consumers' pocketbooks, they protect the public health, City Attorney Jan Goldsmith said.

In the past, eggs have been recalled from out-of-state farms due to salmonella poisoning. Consumers who mistakenly believed their eggs were from California would not be concerned upon learning of a recall of Iowa eggs, for example, and so might not seek out information that would protect their families from illness.

Additionally, the source of eggs is important to many California consumers following passage of the Standards for Confining Farm Animals initiative, which was approved by California voters in November 2008 and took effect in January as the Prevention of Farm Animal Cruelty Act. It sets forth requirements for California egg producers and out-of-state eggs plants that sell within California.

Hidden Villa Ranch has since revised its packaging. The case was prosecuted by the office's Consumer and Environmental Protection Unit, which is led by Chief Deputy City Attorney Kathryn Lange Turner.

The City Attorney does not traditionally accept settlements in forms other than U.S. currency, but Goldsmith said his office looks for opportunities where defendants in consumer-protection lawsuits can give back to the community.

"This was a creative resolution, and a win-win for San Diego," Goldsmith said. **"Our food banks get \$50,000 in eggs to help the needy. Our office enforces the law, and Hidden Villa Ranch is held accountable."**

Officials of the Feeding America San Diego and the Jacobs & Cushman San Diego Food Bank said they appreciated the eggs, which food banks rarely see because of their fragility, but which are a highly valued source of protein with many uses in cooking.

“Thanks to this valuable donation, we’ve been able to distribute more than 400 cases of eggs at our school pantries across San Diego County,” Jenny Seneor, the Director of Programs for Feeding America San Diego, said. “Our clients consistently share how important it is for them to be able to put healthy meals on the table for their growing children. And these eggs – paired with fresh vegetables in a delicious omelet, or with fruit and bread for a well-rounded breakfast – will fill tables across the county.”

James Floros, President and CEO of the Jacobs & Cushman San Diego Food Bank, noted that food bank donations slow during the summer months, despite increased demand from families whose children are no longer participating in school-run meal programs.

“The timing of this donation could not be better,” Floros said. “In the summer we see a tremendous drop in donations and, at the same time, a tremendous spike in demand from the 330 non-profit agencies we partner with.”

The nutritious and versatile egg, Floros said, “is a tough commodity to come by. We couldn’t ask for a better donation.”

Regulations for disclosing where eggs originate fall under the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which requires only that the egg plant’s code number be printed on the carton. Consumers must then check that code on a U.S. Department of Agriculture website.

For more information on how to determine the source of shelled eggs you purchase, see the United States Department of Agriculture’s webpage http://apps.ams.usda.gov/plantbook/Query_Pages/PlantBook_Query.asp and insert the plant number found on the side of the egg carton. The California Department of Agriculture also keeps a list of registered egg handlers: <http://www.cdffa.ca.gov/ahfss/mpes/pdfs/CurrentRegisteredEggHandlers.pdf>. Other California laws related to the sale of eggs may be found here: http://www.cdffa.ca.gov/ahfss/mpes/pdfs/Shell_Egg_Handler_Information.pdf.

The City Attorney’s Consumer & Environmental Protection Unit (CEPU) maintains a Consumer Hotline at (619) 533-5600, which consumers can call to report consumer complaints.

For consumer tips and information, check out consumer news on the City Attorney’s webpage, Newsletters/Office of the City Attorney or at <http://www.sandiego.gov/cityattorney/media/newsletters.shtml>.

ABOUT FEEDING AMERICA SAN DIEGO

Established in 2007, Feeding America San Diego is San Diego’s largest hunger-relief organization, distributing 25 million pounds of food within the last year, and the only Feeding America affiliate in the county. FASD works closely with over 150 partner agencies, local school districts, corporate partners and a network of volunteers to serve 59,000 children, families and seniors in need each week. Devoted to feeding the hungry, advocacy and education, FASD is building a hunger-free and healthy San Diego through innovative programs and collaborative partnerships. To learn more, visit feedingamericasd.org.

ABOUT THE JACOBS & CUSHMAN SAN DIEGO FOOD BANK

Established in 1977, the Jacobs & Cushman San Diego Food Bank is a critical component to the welfare of San Diego County, providing food to people in need, advocating for the hungry and educating the public about hunger-related issues. Through a combination of government programs and partnerships with over 330 San Diego County nonprofit charities, the Food Bank acts as a central repository and distribution point for government and donated food. The Food Bank distributed 22 million pounds of food in the fiscal year 2013-2014 to individuals, families, and a network of nonprofit organizations that work to alleviate hunger throughout the county. Visit the Food Bank at: www.sandiegofoodbank.org

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1200 Third Avenue, Suite 1620, San Diego, California 92101-4188 (619) 236-6220