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SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2012

A GANNETT COMPANY

A JOURNAL NEWS SPECIAL INVESTIGATION



HOW SAFE IS YOUR FOOD?

A Rockland Bakery worker prepares bread. Deficiencies found in 2010 were later resolved. MATTHEW BROWN/ THE JOURNAL NEWS



Cavatelli being freeze dried at John's Ravioli. The New Rochelle company has a clean record in sanitary inspections. RICKY FLORES/THE JOURNAL NEWS



A sign on a freezer at John's Ravioli, which had virtually no deficiencies during inspections over three years. RICKY FLORES/THE JOURNAL NEWS

Inspectors find critical deficiencies at 15 companies

By Ernie Garcia
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John's Ravioli in New Rochelle has been in Robert Guarnero's family for three generations, and as president, Guarnero is responsible for the company's cleanliness.

"My children eat my food," said Guarnero, 57, of Harrison, whose company at 15 Drake Ave. has a near-perfect state sanitary inspection record for the past three years. "I believe (the factory) should be clean up to the same standards as my house."

Not all local food manufacturers live up to Guarnero's track record.

A review of state sanitary inspection reports for 59 companies in the Lower Hudson Valley that produce food for stores or large institutions showed that 15 companies had critical deficiencies between 2010 and 2012. The deficiencies ranged from rodent droppings and

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SANITARY DEFICIENCIES

These local food companies were fined by the New York Department of Agriculture and Markets for unsanitary conditions at their facilities between 2010 and 2012.

Homestyle Desserts
Peekskill, 3/2/2010, \$600

Salinger's Orchards
Brewster, 3/30/2010, \$600

Daily Pita
Yonkers, 9/8/2010, \$600

Ace Endico Corp.
Mount Vernon, 10/25/2010, \$600

The Bread Factory
New Rochelle, 1/10/2011, \$600

ONLINE » See this report at LoHud.com to download inspection reports for 59 local food producers.

FOOD: 5 firms fined; many resolve issues by next inspection

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vermin infestations to dirty kitchen equipment and inadequate employee hand-washing facilities.

State inspectors define a critical deficiency as "a condition that does not conform to the department's sanitary requirements, and poses an immediate threat to public health," Agriculture and Markets spokesman Joe Morrissey said.

A general deficiency is a violation of the state's sanitary laws but it is not severe enough to be an immediate threat, such as a dirty floor, he said.

Some of the companies repeatedly cited for critical and general deficiencies were fined for their transgressions, including The Bread Factory in New Rochelle, Daily Pita in Yonkers and Salinger's Orchards in Brewster. All three companies paid \$600 fines.

The good news is that the reports show most local food processors with critical or general deficiencies correct their problems by their subsequent inspections. Even companies with devoted followings get written up.

Rockland Bakery's general deficiencies during a March 29 inspection included missing sanitizer tests in the deli and bakery sinks, failure to maintain cooking-temperature records for rice balls stuffed with meat and inaccurate thermometers in the deli area.

Thermometers are required in food venues to ensure that cold food is kept at 45 degrees or lower and hot foods are held at 140 degrees or higher; sanitizer tests are used to ensure that sanitizing solutions for utensils and trays have the right amount of disinfectant.

Sal Battaglia, Rockland Bakery's president, described the deficiencies in the March 29 inspection report as "minor stuff." On Sept. 13 Battaglia spontaneously invited a Journal News reporter and photographer inside his plant at 94 Demarest Mill Road in Nanuet, where 120 workers baked several bread styles during the noon shift, one of three shifts at the 24-hour-a-day factory that makes 800 kinds of bread.

"No matter how good you are, the inspectors are here for two or three hours. They've got to find something," Battaglia said during a tour of the bakery.

State inspector John Quansah spent three hours and 45 minutes at Rockland Bakery during his March 29 visit, according to the report.

Battaglia said he's held to a higher standard by his corporate customers who send their own inspectors and by retail customers who can see plant conditions for themselves when they come into part of the factory's baking area to select breads. The bakery's big clients include Yonkers public schools, which bought \$175,771 in products in the 2010-11 school year.

Rockland Bakery's retail customers said the complex was clean.

"People see that there's seeds on the floor that come off the rolls, some crumbs and things, but that's to be expected," said Howard Kasen, 64, of New City. "It's a large operation, but I don't see anything that I would think is unsanitary to the point of being a health risk."

Mount Vernon resident

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SAL BATTAGLIA, Rockland Bakery's president

Deric Brunson, 46, buys his lunch at Rockland Bakery almost every day.

"They have hair nets over their heads. They wear gloves. They're pretty clean," said Brunson, who left the bakery's deli with ribs and macaroni and cheese Sept. 12.

The Journal News obtained the Department of Agriculture and Markets' inspections of local food processors through a Freedom of Information Law request. The newspaper identified the 59 local manufacturers by requesting from the state the names of all food-processing license holders in Putnam, Rockland and Westchester. The Journal News focused on license holders that produce mainly for a wholesale market, and it did not request reports for supermarkets and small delis, which also must have a processor's license if they prepare food.

Agriculture and Markets has 115 food inspectors who make surprise visits to 28,000 food-handling establishments statewide to ensure they are properly licensed and follow the state's food-handling regulations. Inspections typically last 45 minutes to an hour, according to time logs printed on the reports.

Inspectors visit license holders based on risk, which means some companies get three visits a year while low-risk establishments get inspected every two years.

Consumer complaints also initiate inspections, though not all complaints are substantiated. A consumer alleged rodent activity at Carolina's Desserts in Yonkers, but a Feb. 24, 2010, inspection found no evidence of rodents.

Joe Filc, president of Villarina's Pasta in New Rochelle, said rodents and other pests plague many food processors in Westchester because an aged building stock creates more gaps in foundations and basements for pests to enter. Villarina's Pasta at 49 Lawton St. is in a 135-year-old building, Filc said, and while Villarina's inspection reports showed few sanitary deficiencies, inspectors noted rodent droppings as recently as May.

Filc said his outdated location, the high cost of doing business in Westchester and the predominance of his customers in Connecticut prompted the company to relocate to Danbury.

"The facility we are currently building does not have one seam. A fly could not get in," Filc said Aug. 28.

Rodents and their feces are why Salinger's Orchards and Homestyle Desserts in Peekskill got fined.

"It's a farm," said Bruce Salinger, noting that the March 30, 2010, fine was his first and only in 40 years. "It's a very hard thing to control, and now we have it under control."

Rose Sanca of Homestyle Desserts also said her March 2, 2010, fine was her company's first in 42 years. Sanca blamed the rodent problem on construction on Route 9 and said she has renovated her building and sealed it in the past year.

Most food-company owners contacted about their sanitary inspection reports praised the state inspectors' work. Billy Ward, a manager at Bellantoni Bakery at 124 Fulton St. in White Plains, said he expects inspectors to be strict and picky. Inspectors gave Bellantoni Bakery critical deficiencies for mouse droppings and a beetle infestation in unused equipment in 2011.

"All deficiencies have been cleared up, otherwise we wouldn't be able to be in operation," said Ward, explaining that he threw out the unused equipment.

Carousel Cakes at 5 Seeger Drive in Nanuet had six general deficiencies including mouse droppings, missing sani-

tizer tests and cramped storage spaces, but no critical ones on its Jan. 6 inspection.

"As much as we look ourselves, we could always miss something," said David Finkelstein, vice president of Carousel Cakes, referring to the inspectors. "They work with us and help us do our job better."

Finkelstein said consumers reading sanitary inspection reports should bear in mind that his company is being inspected by the state, by his own food-safety consultant and by Carousel Cakes' large clients. Carousel Cakes clients include DeCicco's supermarkets and Zabar's in New York City, according to their website.

He noted that Silliker, a global food-safety company hired by Carousel Cakes, gave the company a 94.6 percent out of 100 score in a May 14 food-safety systems audit.

"We are doing our best to comply with food safety," Finkelstein said.



Sean Young loads pasta Sept. 4 into a cavatelli machine at John's Ravioli, a wholesale food-manufacturing business in New Rochelle that carries a near-spotless sanitary inspection record. RICKY FLORES/THE JOURNAL NEWS

