



**Your on the  
Street Reporter**



**Uyless Black**

**Salmonella Serenades**

## Salmonella Serenades

November 16, 2014

Sung to the tune of “Diarrhea” from the movie *Parenthood*:



We've just learned from off the street,  
that we're merely what we eat:  
    Salmonella, Salmonella.

What we eat can make us sick,  
'still it makes us how we tick:  
    Salmonella, Salmonella.

They say tomatoes are the foe,  
with hot peppers in close tow:  
    Salmonella, Salmonella.

Peanut butter's tasty spread  
On a fine, well-toasted bread is:  
    Salmonella, Salmonella.

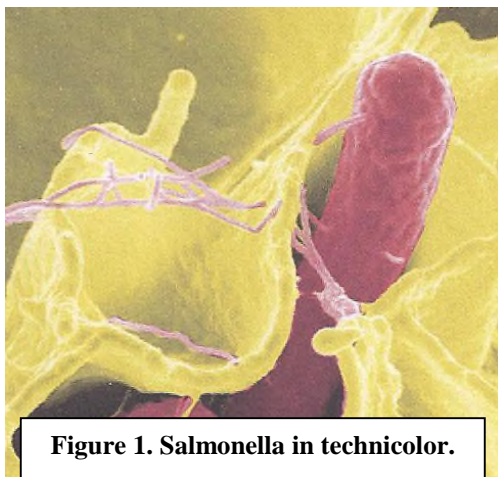


Figure 1. Salmonella in technicolor.

The serenade above is based on sightings the past few years of the Salmonella bacteria in some of America's tomatoes, hot peppers, and peanut butter. The issue has raised concerns because Salmonella can cause fever, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and stomach pain. Some cases lead to hospitalization; some to death.

It is a confusing critter. In a Freudian, Georgia O'Keefe sort of way, Salmonella is strangely fascinating looking, as seen in Figure 1.<sup>1</sup> Granted, it's fair to say we've not seen any of these yellow, red

growths on our tomatoes, along-side our chili peppers, or in our peanut butter. Anyway, I can deal with the yellow parts of the bacterium. But the red? Maybe it's a male thing, but it looks pretty Freudian to me.

Aside from Salmonella esthetics, its presence in our food is leading to more reluctant eaters from America's horn of plenty. To complicate matters, the USDA labels on the wrappers at the grocery store do not include a Salmonella count in the food. Perhaps it's a quirk of mine, but I would prefer knowing the “% Daily Value” of Salmonella in what I eat. It is more important to me than the “% Daily Value” of dietary fiber. Salmonella makes you sick. Dietary

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.google.com/#q=pictures+of+salmonella+bacteria>.

fiber may help you stay well. Given these possible outcomes, I would like more information about the amount of Salmonella in my Peter Pan Peanut Butter.

If the USDA requires food producers to measure the amounts of about 25 ingredients in a jar of peanut butter or a package of instant potatoes, why can't they direct these companies to measure the amount of Salmonella in the product? If they can do a "Dietary Fiber" analysis, why can't they do a "Salmonella" analysis?

As a consumer of processed and packaged food, I would appreciate a Salmonella count for this stuff. For example, we consumers will need an additional entry in the "Nutrition Facts:"

Nutrition Facts			
Serving Size 1/3 cup as packaged (23g) 1/2 cup prepared			
Servings Per Container about 17			
Amount Per Serving	As pkgd	Prepared	
<b>Calories</b>	90	140	
Calories from Fat	0	50	
% Daily Value**			
<b>Total Fat</b> 0g*	<b>0%</b>	<b>9%</b>	
Saturated Fat 0g	<b>0%</b>	<b>7%</b>	
Trans Fat 0g			
<b>Cholesterol</b> 0mg	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>	
<b>Sodium</b> 25mg	<b>1%</b>	<b>18%</b>	
<b>Potassium</b> 320mg	<b>9%</b>	<b>10%</b>	
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 19g	<b>6%</b>	<b>7%</b>	
Dietary Fiber 1g	<b>5%</b>	<b>5%</b>	
Sugars 0g			
<b>Protein</b> 2g			
Vitamin A	0%	4%	
Vitamin C	2%	2%	
Calcium	0%	2%	
Niacin	6%	6%	
Not a significant source of iron.			
* Amount as packaged. As prepared, one serving provides 6g total fat (1.5g saturated fat, 1g trans fat), 440mg sodium, 340mg potassium, 20g total carbohydrate (less than 1g sugars) and 3g protein.			
** Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:			
	Calories	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Sat Fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Potassium		3,500mg	3,500mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g

Amount Per Serving As pkg Prepared  
Salmonella xx mg xx% xx%

With this practice, consumers can make informed decisions on what they consume. We can trade-off our possible ingestion of sodium vs. Salmonella. Because we are informed by the media that rogue Salmonella germs are infecting our processed food, and as a consequence, our bodies are ingesting them into our systems, we should at least have an idea of the possible damage. Like cigarettes, there could be a label such as, "Peanut butter may be dangerous to your health."

I'm concentrating on Salmonella, because several outbreaks over the past few years have been attributed to the Salmonella bacteria. From news accounts, it is making people very sick and sometimes very dead. In a past outbreak, the culprit was identified as raw red tomatoes.<sup>2</sup> But not all raw red tomatoes, only those tomatoes found in states near the Mexican border. It's another form of Montezuma's Revenge.

Additionally, only those tomatoes that were raw "red plum, red Roma, or round red tomatoes" were targeted for the tomato eaters' picket lines. The research claimed, "Cherry tomatoes, grape tomatoes, tomatoes sold with the vine still attached...are not associated with the outbreak."<sup>3</sup>

Pick your poison and take it with grace? Shop the grocery aisles and roll the dice? Look for tomatoes that are vine-attached? Roma vs. Cherry? Hot peppers vs. not-so-hot peppers? Peter Pan vs. JIFF? And

how serious was this problem anyway? How many rouge tomatoes were tainted with Salmonella?

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<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Weise, "About 150 get illness linked to tomatoes," *USA TODAY*, July 9, 2008, 4A.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

Sung to the tune of “Peanut Butter” from the 1961 hit from The Marathons:



There's a food that's going 'round, and it's a sticky, sticky goo

- Peanut, peanut butter!

It used to taste so good, now it's very hard to chew

- Peanut, peanut butter!

Every day it's on my toast, now I'm feeling like a ghost.

- Peanut, peanut butter!

**Chorus:** I like peanut butter, creamy peanut butter, chunky peanut butter, too!



How serious were these various Salmonella outbreaks? From the sources cited in footnotes, only 150 people in 16 states were infected by eating raw red tomatoes. Among millions of tomato eaters, how serious can this be? It is an almost indiscernible blip on the food infection screen. But federal officials say this Salmonella situation was the “largest outbreak of food-borne illness in decades.”<sup>4</sup> The Feds later expanded the number of afflicted intestines to 1,000 people.

1,000? How many people eat tomatoes each day? As said, millions. Is Uncle Sam micro-managing? Maybe so, maybe no. But we're the taxpayers. How much do we want to pay to bring this figure down to 0? Can it be done?

For the Salmonella tomato outbreak, the tomato industry took a big hit. Farmers and distributors suffered huge losses. Tomatoes rotted on the vine for lack of adventuresome eaters. Blame games came into place as tomato growers in Mexico and America positioned themselves against one another and Uncle Sam.

### **Sorry, Wrong Veggie**

It turns out that the tomato industry had been pasted. The tomato farmer was not necessarily the culprit in this saga. The Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), after claiming, “...tomatoes are most likely responsible for the outbreak of a rare strain of salmonella” later advised, “...avoid fresh jalapeno peppers and Serrano peppers.”<sup>5</sup>

Uncle Sam changed his mind. For this scare, it was not tomatoes that carried Salmonella. It was possibly hot peppers or maybe tomatoes. How did Uncle Sam come to this conclusion? “A statistical analysis found that some who got sick from Salmonella...had eaten either jalapenos (peppers) or tomatoes, or both.” That's what our tax dollars are buying.

No, we are buying even more astute investigative research. The CDC was also on the track of fresh cilantro. This veggie was under the eye of the Feds because it may have been eaten in a tomato, jalapeno, and cilantro taco.

How about lettuce? Or taco sauce? Or corn tortillas? Or the hands of the taco makers at the local taco take-out? Who knows what or who those hands had visited?

As if we tomato, jalapeno, cilantro fans were not put-out already, if you like your taco with peanut butter, you're even in worse shape. In another episode, Peter Pan and other peanut

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<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Weise, “Salmonella warnings shift focus to hot peppers,” *USA TODAY*, July 10, 2008, 1A.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 1A, as well as subsequent quotes.

butter producers were cited by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for putting Salmonella in their peanut butter and not including it in their “Nutrition Facts” labels.

According to news releases, the peanut butter plague affected 403 people in 43 states, and “...[was] believed to have contributed to eight deaths.”<sup>6</sup> The FDA officials stated the Peanut Corporation of America (PCA), located in Georgia, had been negligent in cleaning its peanut butter tubs.

### **Should We Care?**

Should we be concerned that a miniscule number of people have been affected by the Salmonella outbreaks in tomatoes, or jalapenos, or maybe cilantro, as was well as peanut butter? Should we care that governmental agencies target the wrong food, which leads to severe commercial consequences for many well-meaning citizens?

We should care. After reading about animal slaughter houses, after walking-around chicken and turkey “farms” near my former home in Front Royal, Virginia---prisons we would not even put a bin Laden-type person in; after learning about the pollution of the Chesapeake Bay because of (excuse the French) chicken shit and chicken shit managers, I don’t trust these people as far as I can throw an empty peanut shell. I’ve been there and seen it. The food industry systematically cuts corners, often to the endangerment of its consumers.

The PCA was tagged previously by the FDA for not taking steps to clean its tubs after finding Salmonella in them. Just consider this ethical vacuity: The company was ordered to clean up, but it did not, and people are dead because of this inaction. An inadvertent mistake is one thing. Recurrent sloppiness and arrogant incompetence, leading to deaths, is another.

If the owners of a company were made personally liable for killing people because their peanut butter tubs were not cleaned, I’d wager they would take a keener interest in these operations. But the cloak of the corporation all too often keeps them protected from any personal culpability. Here is a comment that says a lot about the void of responsibility in parts of our business world today:<sup>7</sup>

Shipping products known to be contaminated is “a violation of the law,” says FDA’s Stephen Sundlof. “Whether or not there was any criminal activity is a different issue.”

People were killed, Mr. Sundlof. Not because of a slip-up. Because of “...12 instances in which plant officials identified salmonella in ingredients or finished products. The products should not have been shipped, the FDA says. PCA took no steps to address cleaning after finding the salmonella.”<sup>8</sup> America’s justice system puts a person behind bars for life for selling pot. A slothful, careless, and incompetent peanut butter executive goes scot-free in spite of his company’s responsibility for *killing* someone.

As many of my readers have come to know, this writer, a private businessman and defender of the free market, has been taking so-called private enterprise to task these past few years. I’ve been especially harsh and strident about the perverse excesses of Wall Street.

But I’ve not wavered in my basic beliefs. A successful society, with a functioning business milieu, must first-and-foremost rely on the personal integrity of those who are “in

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<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Wise and Julie Schmit, “FDA: Salmonella detected before,” *USA TODAY*, January 28, 2010, 1B.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

charge” of the society. They must dictate its operations, take the rewards for its successes, and take the hits for its failures.

In corporate America, those who are in charge are largely immune from their failures. Golden parachutes are awarded to almost anyone who is high on the management ladder. My detractors say high-level executives get sacked often. I disagree. And if it happens, a golden parachute lights the guilty parties gently to ground at their Caribbean getaways.

The topic is too much of a downer. Let’s lighten the load with some more lyrics from The Marathons...slightly altered for this report:



My dog started barking in the middle of the night.

- Peanut, peanut butter!

He woke up all my neighbors. I almost had to fight.

- Peanut, peanut butter!

So I gave him peanut butter just to try to quiet him down.

- Peanut, peanut butter!

The Salmonella made him sleep, and he never made a sound.

- Peanut, peanut butter!

**Chorus:** My dog liked peanut butter, creamy peanut butter, chunky peanut butter, too!

