

Four men and a business all convicted for diverting meat unfit for human consumption back into the human food chain

Three men, Mark Hooper, Azar Irshad, and Ali Afzal entered guilty pleas for their involvement in serious food crimes. The fourth defendant Anthony Fear, sole director of a business known as Fears Animal Byproducts, entered not guilty pleas for himself and on behalf of his business and elected to stand trial.

The court heard evidence of a complex investigation that started when Southwark officers found 1.9 tonnes of Category 3 animal by products, which included whole and cut chickens, lamb's testicles and beef burgers, in an illegal meat cutting plant in London and being processed for sale into the human food chain.

NFCU enquiries traced the animal by-products back to legitimate food business operators who confirmed these meat products had been sent to Fears Animal Byproducts in Somerset for manufacture into pet foods or for safe disposal.

Once meat is classified as an animal by product, for food safety reasons it can never be placed back into the human food chain. Evidence of criminal conspiracy was then pieced together following analysis of large volumes of communications data and other evidence that demonstrated the criminal relationships between the four accused men.

The trial lasted over 11 weeks. On 27 March 2025, the jury found both Fear and his business unanimously guilty of the offence of conspiracy to defraud by placing unfit food on the market.

In closing remarks His Honour Judge Lucas praised the quality and professionalism of the investigation and formally commended the lead NFCU Investigator, Andrew Yeats, stating how impressed he had been with the quality of the investigation and the evidence provided by him.

At earlier hearings on 13 January 2025:

- Mark Hooper a manager at Fears Animal Byproducts pleaded guilty to conspiracy to defraud by placing unfit food on the market.
- Azar Irshad pleaded guilty to conspiracy to defraud, failure to comply with Regulation 19 Food Safety & Hygiene Regulations relating to Unapproved Premises, Placing Unfit Food on the Market (Smokies), Placing Unfit Food on the Market (Out of Date Beef Burgers) and Placing Unfit Food on the Market (Illegally Diverted ABP Cat 3).
- Ali Afzal pleaded guilty to failure to comply with Reg 19 Food Safety & Hygiene Regulations relating to Unapproved Premises.

"These five convictions have been secured following an extensive investigation led by the NFCU which required meticulous examination of large volumes of evidence. The NFCU worked closely with Southwark Council and other partners to enable this successful prosecution. It is anticipated that in due course the sentencing will reflect the serious nature of this offending and will act as a deterrent to other bad actors in

the food chain.”

Andrew Quinn, Head of NFCU

“These violations highlight the blatant disregard for food safety laws that protect public health - all for profit. Consumers who unknowingly purchase and consume these products are exposed to potential health hazards.

We will not tolerate such reckless and deceitful behaviour and no matter how long it takes; we will use all our available powers to bring criminals to justice.

Together with the NFCU, our officers worked relentlessly to uncover the truth and ensure those responsible are made to pay for their crimes. We hope sentencing reflects the gravity of the crimes committed.”

Councillor Natasha Ennin, Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Neighbourhoods, Southwark Council

If you suspect food fraud, report it to Food Crime Confidential always available on food.gov.uk/report or by phoning 0800 028 1180 (0207 276 8787 for non-UK mobiles and calls).