

Assigned for all purposes to: Stanley Mosk Courthouse, Judicial Officer: Anthony Mohr

1 Reuben Yeroushalmi (SBN 193981)
2 Peter T. Sato (SBN 238486)
3 **YEROUSHALMI & YEROUSHALMI**
4 An Association of Independent Law Corporations
5 9100 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 240W
6 Beverly Hills, California 90212
7 Telephone: (310) 623-1926
8 Facsimile: (310) 623-1930

9 Attorneys for Plaintiff,
10 Consumer Advocacy Group, Inc.

11 **SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA**
12 **COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES**

13 CONSUMER ADVOCACY GROUP, INC.,
14 in the public interest,

15 Plaintiff,

16 v.

17 NUMERO UNO MARKETS, a business
18 entity form unknown;
19 MIRAVALLE FOODS, INC., A California
20 Corporation;
21 and DOES 1-10.

22 Defendants.

CASE NO.

COMPLAINT FOR PENALTY AND
INJUNCTION

Violation of Proposition 65, the Safe
Drinking Water and Toxic Enforcement
Act of 1986 (*Health & Safety Code*, §
25249.5, *et seq.*)

ACTION IS AN UNLIMITED CIVIL
CASE (exceeds \$25,000)

23 Plaintiff CONSUMER ADVOCACY GROUP, INC. alleges a cause of action against
24 defendants NUMERO UNO MARKETS, MIRRAVALLE FOODS, INC., and DOES 1-10 as
25 follows:

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THE PARTIES

1. Plaintiff CONSUMER ADVOCACY GROUP, INC. (“Plaintiff” or “CAG”) is an organization qualified to do business in the State of California. CAG is a person within the meaning of Health and Safety Code section 25249.11, subdivision (a). CAG, acting as a private attorney general, brings this action in the public interest as defined under Health and Safety Code section 25249.7, subdivision (d).
2. Defendant NUMERO UNO MARKETS, (“NUMERO UNO”) is a business entity form unknown doing business in the State of California at all relevant times herein.
3. Defendant MIRAVALLE FOODS, INC. (“MIRAVALLE”) is a California Corporation, qualified to do business and doing business in the State of California at all relevant times herein.
4. Plaintiff is presently unaware of the true names and capacities of defendants DOES 1-10, and therefore sues these defendants by such fictitious names. Plaintiff will amend this complaint to allege their true names and capacities when ascertained. Plaintiff is informed, believes, and thereon alleges that each fictitiously named defendant is responsible in some manner for the occurrences herein alleged and the damages caused thereby.
5. At all times mentioned herein, the term “Defendants” includes NUMERO UNO, MIRAVALLE, and DOES 1-10.
6. Plaintiff is informed and believes, and thereon alleges that each of the Defendants at all times mentioned herein have conducted business within the State of California.
7. Upon information and belief, at all times relevant to this action, each of the Defendants, including DOES 1-10, was an agent, servant, or employee of each of the other Defendants. In conducting the activities alleged in this Complaint, each of the Defendants was acting within the course and scope of this agency, service, or employment, and was acting with the consent, permission, and authorization of each of the other Defendants. All actions of each of the Defendants alleged in this Complaint

1 were ratified and approved by every other Defendant or their officers or managing agents.
2 Alternatively, each of the Defendants aided, conspired with and/or facilitated the alleged
3 wrongful conduct of each of the other Defendants.

- 4 8. Plaintiff is informed, believes, and thereon alleges that at all relevant times, each of the
5 Defendants was a person doing business within the meaning of Health and Safety Code
6 section 25249.11, subdivision (b), and that each of the Defendants had ten (10) or more
7 employees at all relevant times.

8 **JURISDICTION**

- 9 9. The Court has jurisdiction over this lawsuit pursuant to California Constitution Article
10 VI, Section 10, which grants the Superior Court original jurisdiction in all causes except
11 those given by statute to other trial courts. This Court has jurisdiction over this action
12 pursuant to Health and Safety Code section 25249.7, which allows enforcement of
13 violations of Proposition 65 in any Court of competent jurisdiction.

- 14 10. This Court has jurisdiction over Defendants named herein because Defendants either
15 reside or are located in this State or are foreign corporations authorized to do business in
16 California, are registered with the California Secretary of State, or who do sufficient
17 business in California, have sufficient minimum contacts with California, or otherwise
18 intentionally avail themselves of the markets within California through their manufacture,
19 distribution, promotion, marketing, or sale of their products within California to render
20 the exercise of jurisdiction by the California courts permissible under traditional notions
21 of fair play and substantial justice.

- 22 11. Venue is proper in the County of Los Angeles because one or more of the instances of
23 wrongful conduct occurred, and continues to occur, in the County of Los Angeles and/or
24 because Defendants conducted, and continue to conduct, business in the County of Los
25 Angeles with respect to the consumer product that is the subject of this action.

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1 **BACKGROUND AND PRELIMINARY FACTS**

2 12. In 1986, California voters approved an initiative to address growing concerns about
3 exposure to toxic chemicals and declared their right “[t]o be informed about exposures to
4 chemicals that cause cancer, birth defects, or other reproductive harm.” Ballot Pamp.,
5 Proposed Law, Gen. Elec. (Nov. 4, 1986) at p. 3. The initiative, The Safe Drinking
6 Water and Toxic Enforcement Act of 1986, codified at Health and Safety Code sections
7 25249.5, *et seq.* (“Proposition 65”), helps to protect California’s drinking water sources
8 from contamination, to allow consumers to make informed choices about the products
9 they buy, and to enable persons to protect themselves from toxic chemicals as they see
10 fit.

11 13. Proposition 65 requires the Governor of California to publish a list of chemicals known to
12 the state to cause cancer, birth defects, or other reproductive harm. *Health & Safety Code*
13 § 25249.8. The list, which the Governor updates at least once a year, contains over 700
14 chemicals and chemical families. Proposition 65 imposes warning requirements and
15 other controls that apply to Proposition 65-listed chemicals.

16 14. All businesses with ten (10) or more employees that operate or sell products in California
17 must comply with Proposition 65. Under Proposition 65, businesses are: (1) prohibited
18 from knowingly discharging Proposition 65-listed chemicals into sources of drinking
19 water (*Health & Safety Code* § 25249.5), and (2) required to provide “clear and
20 reasonable” warnings before exposing a person, knowingly and intentionally, to a
21 Proposition 65-listed chemical (*Health & Safety Code* § 25249.6).

22 15. Proposition 65 provides that any person "violating or threatening to violate" the statute
23 may be enjoined in any court of competent jurisdiction. *Health & Safety Code* § 25249.7.

24 "Threaten to violate" means "to create a condition in which there is a substantial
25 probability that a violation will occur." *Health & Safety Code* § 25249.11(e).

26 Defendants are also liable for civil penalties of up to \$2,500.00 per day per violation,
27 recoverable in a civil action. *Health & Safety Code* § 25249.7(b).

1 16. Plaintiff identified certain practices of manufacturers and distributors of Ground
2 Cinnamon of exposing, knowingly and intentionally, persons in California to the
3 Proposition 65-listed chemicals of such products without first providing clear and
4 reasonable warnings of such to the exposed persons prior to the time of exposure.
5 Plaintiff later discerned that Defendants engaged in such practice.

6 17. On October 1, 1992, the Governor of California added Lead and Lead Compounds
7 (“Lead”) to the list of chemicals known to the State to cause cancer (*Cal. Code Regs.* tit.
8 27, § 27001(b)). Pursuant to Health and Safety Code sections 25249.9 and 25249.10,
9 twenty (20) months after addition of Lead to the list of chemicals known to the State to
10 cause cancer, Lead became fully subject to Proposition 65 warning requirements and
11 discharge prohibitions.

12 18. On February 27, 1987, the Governor of California added Lead to the list of chemicals
13 known to the State to cause reproductive toxicity (*Cal. Code Regs.* tit. 27, § 27001(c)).
14 Lead is known to the State to cause developmental, female, and male reproductive
15 toxicity. Pursuant to Health and Safety Code sections 25249.9 and 25249.10, twenty (20)
16 months after addition of Lead to the list of chemicals known to the State to cause
17 reproductive toxicity, Lead became fully subject to Proposition 65 warning requirements
18 and discharge prohibitions.

19 **SATISFACTION OF PRIOR NOTICE**

20 19. On or about January 18, 2019, Plaintiff gave notice of alleged violations of Health and
21 Safety Code section 25249.6, concerning consumer products exposures, subject to a
22 private action to NUMERO UNO, MIRAVALLE, and to the California Attorney
23 General, County District Attorneys, and City Attorneys for each city containing a
24 population of at least 750,000 people in whose jurisdictions the violations allegedly
25 occurred, concerning the Ground Cinnamon.

1 20. Before sending the notices of alleged violation, Plaintiff investigated the consumer
2 products involved, the likelihood that such products would cause users to suffer
3 significant exposures to Lead, and the corporate structure of each of the Defendants.

4 21. Plaintiff's notice of alleged violation included a Certificate of Merit executed by the
5 attorney for the noticing party, CAG. The Certificate of Merit stated that the attorney for
6 Plaintiff who executed the certificate had consulted with at least one person with relevant
7 and appropriate expertise who reviewed data regarding the exposures to Lead, the subject
8 Proposition 65-listed chemical of this action. Based on that information, the attorney for
9 Plaintiff who executed the Certificate of Merit believed there was a reasonable and
10 meritorious case for this private action. The attorney for Plaintiff attached to the
11 Certificate of Merit served on the Attorney General the confidential factual information
12 sufficient to establish the basis of the Certificate of Merit.

13 22. Plaintiff's notices of alleged violations also included a Certificate of Service and a
14 document entitled "The Safe Drinking Water & Toxic Enforcement Act of 1986
15 (Proposition 65) A Summary." *Health & Safety Code* § 25249.7(d).

16 23. Plaintiff is commencing this action more than sixty (60) days from the dates that Plaintiff
17 gave notices of the alleged violations to NUMERO UNO, MIRAVALLE, and the public
18 prosecutors referenced in Paragraph 19.

19 24. Plaintiff is informed, believes, and thereon alleges that neither the Attorney General, nor
20 any applicable district attorney or city attorney has commenced and is diligently
21 prosecuting an action against the Defendants.

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1 **FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION**

2 **(By CONSUMER ADVOCACY GROUP, INC. and against NUMERO UNO,**
3 **MIRAVALLE, and DOES 1-10 for Violations of Proposition 65, The Safe Drinking**
4 **Water and Toxic Enforcement Act of 1986 (*Health & Safety Code, §§ 25249.5, et***
5 ***seq.*))**

6 **Ground Spices**

- 7 25. Plaintiff CONSUMER ADVOCACY GROUP, INC. repeats and incorporates by
8 reference paragraphs 1 through 24 of this complaint as though fully set forth herein.
- 9 26. Each of the Defendants is, and at all times mentioned herein was, a manufacturer,
10 distributor, promoter, or retailer of Ground Cinnamon ("Cinnamon"), identified as:
11 "Miravalle;" "CANELA MOLIDA;" "GROUND CINNAMON;" "NetWt..75 oz
12 (21g);" "Chiles, Spices, Herbs & Snacks;" "Distributed by: Miravalle Foods, Inc.;"
13 "Lot#0062;" "712810005099"
- 14 27. Cinnamon contains Lead.
- 15 28. Defendants knew or should have known that Lead has been identified by the State of
16 California as a chemical known to cause cancer, developmental, and reproductive toxicity
17 and therefore was subject to Proposition 65 warning requirements. Defendants were also
18 informed of the presence of relevant chemical in Product within Plaintiff's notice of
19 alleged violations further discussed above at Paragraph 19.
- 20 29. Plaintiff's allegations regarding Cinnamon concerns "[c]onsumer products exposure[s],"
21 which "is an exposure that results from a person's acquisition, purchase, storage,
22 consumption, or other reasonably foreseeable use of a consumer good, or any exposure
23 that results from receiving a consumer service." *Cal. Code Regs. tit. 27, § 25602(b)*.
24 Cinnamon is a consumer product, and, as mentioned herein, exposures to Lead took place
25 as a result of such normal and foreseeable consumption and use.
- 26 30. Plaintiff is informed, believes, and thereon alleges that between January 18, 2016 and the
27 present, each of the Defendants knowingly and intentionally exposed their employees and
28 California consumers and users of Cinnamon, which Defendants manufactured,
distributed, or sold as mentioned above, to Lead, without first providing any type of clear

1 and reasonable warning of such to the exposed persons before the time of exposure.

2 Defendants have distributed and sold Cinnamon in California. Defendants know and
3 intend that California consumers will use and consume Cinnamon, thereby exposing them
4 to Lead. Defendants thereby violated Proposition 65.

5 31. The principal routes of exposure are and were through ingestion, especially direct (oral)
6 ingestion, hand to mouth pathways, inhalation, and trans-dermal absorption. Persons
7 sustain exposures primarily by eating and consuming Cinnamon, and additionally by
8 handling Cinnamon without wearing gloves or any other personal protective equipment,
9 or by touching bare skin or mucous membranes with gloves after handling Cinnamon as
10 well as through direct and indirect hand to mouth contact, hand to mucous membrane, or
11 even breathing in particulate matter dispersed from Cinnamon.

12 32. Plaintiff is informed, believes, and thereon alleges that each of Defendants' violations of
13 Proposition 65 as to Cinnamon have been ongoing and continuous to the date of the
14 signing of this complaint, as Defendants engaged and continue to engage in conduct
15 which violates Health and Safety Code section 25249.6, including the manufacture,
16 distribution, promotion, and sale of Cinnamon, so that a separate and distinct violation of
17 Proposition 65 occurred each and every time a person was exposed to lead by Cinnamon
18 as mentioned herein.

19 33. Plaintiff is informed, believes, and thereon alleges that each violation of Proposition 65
20 mentioned herein is ever continuing. Plaintiff further alleges and believes that the
21 violations alleged herein will continue to occur into the future.

22 34. Based on the allegations herein, Defendants are liable for civil penalties of up to
23 \$2,500.00 per day per individual exposure to Lead from Cinnamon, pursuant to Health
24 and Safety Code section 25249.7(b).

25 35. Plaintiff has engaged in good faith efforts to resolve the claims alleged herein prior to
26 filing this Complaint.

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1 **PRAYER FOR RELIEF**

2 Plaintiff demands against each of the Defendants as follows:

- 3 1. A permanent injunction mandating Proposition 65-compliant warnings;
- 4 2. Penalties pursuant to Health and Safety Code section 25249.7, subdivision (b);
- 5 3. Costs of suit;
- 6 4. Reasonable attorney fees and costs; and
- 7 5. Any further relief that the court may deem just and equitable.

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9 Dated: May 14,2019

YEROUSHALMI & YEROUSHALMI

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12 BY: 

13 Reuben Yeroushalmi
14 Attorneys for Plaintiff,
15 Consumer Advocacy Group, Inc.

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