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ELECTRONICALLY
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Superior Court of California,
County of San Francisco

03/03/2026
Clerk of the Court
BY: DAEJA ROGERS
Deputy Clerk

9 SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

10 COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO

11 GABRIEL ESPINOZA,

12 Plaintiff,

13 vs.

14 MRS. GOOCH'S NATURAL FOOD
15 MARKETS, INC.,

16 Defendant.

Case No.:

CGC-26-634531

**COMPLAINT FOR CIVIL PENALTIES AND
INJUNCTIVE RELIEF**

**(Violation of Health & Safety Code § 25249.5 et
seq.)**

17 Plaintiff Gabriel Espinoza ("Plaintiff"), by and through his attorneys, alleges the following
18 cause of action in the public interest of the citizens of the State of California.

19 **BACKGROUND OF THE CASE**

20 1. Plaintiff brings this representative action on behalf of all California citizens to
21 enforce relevant portions of Safe Drinking Water and Toxic Enforcement Act of 1986, codified at
22 the Health and Safety Code § 25249.5 et seq ("Proposition 65"), which reads, in relevant part,
23 "[n]o person in the course of doing business shall knowingly and intentionally expose any
24 individual to a chemical known to the state to cause cancer or reproductive toxicity without first
25 giving clear and reasonable warning to such individual ...". Health & Safety Code § 25249.6.

26 2. This complaint is a representative action brought by Plaintiff in the public interest
27 of the citizens of the State of California to enforce the People's right to be informed of the health
28 hazards caused by exposure to lead, a toxic chemical found in *Neera's*® 100% fruit tamarind
29 pastes sold, and/or distributed by defendant Mrs. Gooch's Natural Food Markets, Inc. ("Whole

1 Foods” or “Defendant”) in California and manufactured, sold, and/or distributed by AMK Prescott
2 LLC.

3 3. Lead is a harmful chemical known to the State of California to cause cancer and
4 birth defects or other reproductive harm. On October 1, 1992, the state of California listed lead as
5 a chemical known to cause cancer and it has come under the purview of Proposition 65 regulations
6 since that time. Cal. Code Regs. Tit. 27, § 27001(c); Health & Safety Code §§ 25249.8 &
7 25249.10(b). On February 27, 1987, the State of California listed lead as a chemical known to
8 cause birth defects or other reproductive harm.

9 4. Proposition 65 requires all businesses with ten (10) or more employees that operate
10 within California or sell products therein to comply with Proposition 65 regulations. Included in
11 such regulations is the requirement that businesses must label any product containing a Proposition
12 65-listed chemical that will create an exposure above safe harbor levels with a “clear and
13 reasonable” warning before “knowingly and intentionally” exposing any person to any such listed
14 chemical.

15 5. Proposition 65 allows for civil penalties of up to \$2,500.00 per day per violation
16 for up to 365 days to be imposed upon defendants in a civil action for violations of Proposition 65.
17 Health & Safety Code § 25249.7(b). Proposition 65 also allows for any court of competent
18 jurisdiction to enjoin the actions of a defendant which “violate or threaten to violate” the statute.
19 Health & Safety Code § 25249.7.

20 6. Plaintiff alleges that Defendant distributes and/or offers for sale in California,
21 without a requisite exposure warning, *Neera’s*® 100% fruit tamarind pastes (the “Products”) that
22 expose persons to lead when consumed for their intended purpose.

23 7. Defendant’s failure to warn consumers and other individuals in California of the
24 health hazards associated with exposure to lead in conjunction with the sale and/or distribution of
25 the Product is a violation of Proposition 65 and subjects Defendant to the enjoinder and civil
26 penalties described herein.

27 8. Plaintiff seeks civil penalties against Defendant for its violations of Proposition 65
28 in accordance with Health and Safety Code § 25249.7(b).

1 with the California Secretary of State as foreign corporations authorized to do business in the State
2 of California, and/or has otherwise purposefully availed itself of the California market. Such
3 purposeful availment has rendered the exercise of jurisdiction by California courts consistent and
4 permissible with traditional notions of fair play and substantial justice.

5 STATUTORY BACKGROUND

6 16. The people of the State of California declared in Proposition 65 their right “[t]o be
7 informed about exposures to chemicals that cause cancer, birth defects, or other reproductive
8 harm.” (Section 1(b) of Initiative Measure, Proposition 65.)

9 17. To effect this goal, Proposition 65 requires that individuals be provided with a
10 “clear and reasonable warning” before being exposed to substances listed by the State of California
11 as causing cancer and birth defects or other reproductive harm. H&S Code § 25249.6 states, in
12 pertinent part:

13 No person in the course of doing business shall knowingly and intentionally expose any
14 individual to a chemical known to the state to cause cancer or reproductive toxicity without
15 first giving clear and reasonable warning to such individual...

16 18. In this case, exposures are caused by consumer products. A “Consumer Product” is
17 defined as “any article, or component part thereof, including food, that is produced, distributed, or
18 sold for the personal use, consumption or enjoyment of a consumer.” (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 27, §
19 25600.1, subd. (d).) Food includes “dietary supplements” as defined in California Code of
20 Regulations, title 17, section 10200. (*Id.* at subd. (g).) An exposure to a chemical in a Consumer
21 Product is one “which results from a person’s acquisition, purchase, storage, consumption or other
22 reasonably foreseeable use of a consumer good, or any exposure that results from receiving a
23 consumer service.” (27 CCR § 25602, para (b).) H&S Code § 25603(c) states that “a person in the
24 course of doing business ... shall provide a warning to any person to whom the product is sold or
25 transferred unless the product is packaged or labeled with a clear and reasonable warning.”

26 19. An exposure to a chemical in a consumer product is one “which results from a
27 person’s acquisition, purchase, storage, consumption or other reasonably foreseeable use of a
28 consumer good, or any exposure that results from receiving a consumer service.” (27 CCR §

1 25602, para (b).) H&S Code § 25603(c) states that “a person in the course of doing business ...
2 shall provide a warning to any person to whom the product is sold or transferred unless the product
3 is packaged or labeled with a clear and reasonable warning.”

4 20. Pursuant to H&S Code § 25603.1, the warning may be provided by using one or
5 more of the following methods individually or in combination:¹

6 a. A warning that appears on a product’s label or other labeling.

7 b. Identification of the product at the retail outlet in a manner which provides
8 a warning. Identification may be through shelf labeling, signs, menus, or a combination
9 thereof.

10 c. The warnings provided pursuant to subparagraphs (a) and (b) shall be
11 prominently placed upon a product’s labels or other labeling or displayed at the retail outlet
12 with such conspicuousness, as compared with other words, statements, designs, or devices
13 in the label, labeling or display as to render it likely to be read and understood by an
14 ordinary individual under customary conditions of purchase or use.

15 d. A system of signs, public advertising identifying the system and toll-free
16 information services, or any other system that provides clear and reasonable warnings.

17 21. Proposition 65 provides that any “person who violates or threatens to violate” the
18 statute may be enjoined in a court of competent jurisdiction. (H&S Code § 25249.7.) The phrase
19 “threaten to violate” is defined to mean creating “a condition in which there is a substantial
20 probability that a violation will occur.” (H&S Code § 25249.11(e).) Violators are liable for civil
21 penalties of up to \$2,500.00 per day for each violation of the Act (H&S Code § 25249.7) for up to
22 365 days.

23 22. Pursuant to Cal. Code Regs. Tit. 27, § 25600.2(e), a retail seller is responsible for
24 providing the warning required by § 25249.6 of the Act for a consumer product exposure when
25

26 _____
27 ¹ Alternatively, a person in the course of doing business may elect to comply with the warning
28 requirements set out in the amended version of 27 CCR 25601, *et.seq.* as amended on August 30,
2016, and operative on August 30, 2018.

1 one or more of the following circumstances exist: (a) the retailer seller is selling the product under
2 a brand or trademark that is owned or licensed by the retail seller or an affiliated entity; (b) the
3 retailer seller has knowingly introduced a listed chemical into the product, or knowingly caused
4 the listed chemical to be created in the product; (c) the retail seller has covered, obscured or altered
5 a warning label that has been affixed to the product pursuant to § 25600.2(b); (d) the retail seller
6 has received a notice and warning materials for the exposure pursuant to § 25600.2(b)-(c) and the
7 retail seller has sold the product without conspicuously posting or displaying the warning; or (e)
8 the retailer seller has actual knowledge of the potential consumer product exposure requiring the
9 warning, and there is no manufacturer, producer, packager, importer, supplier, or distributor of the
10 product who: (i) is a “person in the course of doing business under § 25249.11(b) of the Act, and
11 (ii) has designated an agent for service of process in California, or has a place of business in
12 California.

13 **FACTUAL BACKGROUND**

14 23. Lead is a harmful chemical known to the State of California to cause cancer and
15 birth defects or other reproductive harm. On October 1, 1992, the state of California listed lead as
16 a chemical known to cause cancer and it has come under the purview of Proposition 65 regulations
17 since that time. Cal. Code Regs. Tit. 27, § 27001(c); Health & Safety Code §§ 25249.8 &
18 25249.10(b). On February 27, 1987, the State of California listed lead as a chemical known to
19 cause birth defects or other reproductive harm.

20 24. On July 24, 2025, Plaintiff purchased the Product from Defendant. At the time of
21 the purchase, Defendant did not provide a clear and reasonable exposure warning pursuant to Cal.
22 Code Regs. Tit. 27, § 25602.

23 25. On September 29, 2025, Plaintiff served notice of alleged violation of Health and
24 Safety Code § 25249.6 (the “Notice”) to Defendant concerning the exposure of California citizens
25 to lead from consumption of the Products without proper warning, subject to a private action to
26 Defendant and to the California Attorney General’s office and the offices of the County District
27 attorneys and City Attorneys for each city with a population greater than 750,000 persons wherein
28 the herein violations allegedly occurred. The exposures that are the subject of the Notice result

1 from the purchase, acquisition, handling and recommended consumption of the Product. The
2 primary route of exposure to lead is through ingestion. When foods contaminated with lead are
3 consumed, ingestion of lead will occur which will increase blood lead levels. No clear and
4 reasonable warning is provided with the Products regarding the health hazards of exposure.

5 26. Defendant has actual knowledge that sales of the Product in California will result
6 in an actionable consumer product exposure pursuant to Cal. Health & Safety Code § 25249.5 et
7 seq.

8 27. Defendant has sold the Product under a brand or trademark that is owned or licensed
9 by Defendant or an affiliated entity; and/or Defendant has knowingly introduced lead into the
10 Product, or knowingly caused lead to be created in the Product; and/or Defendant has covered,
11 obscured or altered a warning label that has been affixed to the Product pursuant to § 25600.2(b);
12 and/or Defendant has received a notice and warning materials for the exposure pursuant to §
13 25600.2(b)-(c) and Defendant has sold the product without conspicuously posting or displaying
14 the warning; and/or Defendant has actual knowledge of the potential consumer product exposure
15 requiring the warning, and there is no manufacturer, producer, packager, importer, supplier, or
16 distributor of the Product who: (i) is a “person in the course of doing business under § 25249.11(b)
17 of the Act, and (ii) has designated an agent for service of process in California, or has a place of
18 business in California.

19 28. At all times relevant to this action, Defendant has knowingly and intentionally
20 exposed consumers of the Products to lead without first giving a clear and reasonable exposure
21 warning to such individuals. More than five business days after receipt of the Notice of Violation,
22 Defendant continued to distribute, sell, and/or offer to and sell in California without the requisite
23 warning information.

24 29. On January 1, 2026, Plaintiff purchased the Product a second time from Defendant.
25 At the time of the purchase, Defendant did not provide a clear and reasonable exposure warning
26 pursuant to Cal. Code Regs. Tit. 27, § 25602.

27 30. As a proximate result of acts by Defendant, as a person in the course of doing
28 business within the meaning of H&S Code § 25249.11, individuals throughout the State of

1 California, including in San Francisco County, have been exposed to lead without a clear and
2 reasonable warning on the Products. The individuals subject to the violative exposures include
3 normal and foreseeable users and consumers that consume the Products, as well as all others
4 exposed to the Products.

5 **SATISFACTION OF NOTICE REQUIREMENTS**

6 31. On July 24, 2025, Plaintiff purchased the Product from Defendant. At the time of
7 purchase, Defendant did not provide a Proposition 65 exposure warning for lead or any other
8 Proposition 65 listed chemical in a manner consistent with H&S Code § 25603.1 as described
9 *supra*.

10 32. The Product was sent to a testing laboratory to determine if, and what amount of,
11 lead a consumer would be exposed to per serving size.

12 33. The laboratory provided the results of its analysis. Results of this test determined
13 the Product exposes consumers to lead (the “Chemical Test Report”).

14 34. Plaintiff provided the Chemical Test Report and Product to an analytical chemist
15 to determine if, based on the findings of the Chemical Test Report and the reasonable and
16 foreseeable consumption of the Product, exposure to lead will occur at levels that require
17 Proposition 65 warnings under the Clear and Reasonable Warnings section 25601 of Title 27 of
18 the California Code of Regulations.

19 35. On September 29, 2025, Plaintiff received from the analytical chemist an exposure
20 assessment report which concluded that persons in California who consume the Products will be
21 exposed to levels of lead that require a Proposition 65 exposure warning.

22 36. On September 29, 2025, Plaintiff served the Notice on Defendant concerning the
23 exposure of California citizens to lead from consumption of the Products without proper warning,
24 subject to a private action to Defendant and to the California Attorney General’s office and the
25 offices of the County District attorneys and City Attorneys for each city with a population greater
26 than 750,000 persons wherein the herein violations allegedly occurred.

27 37. The Notice complied with all procedural requirements of Proposition 65 including
28 the attachment of a Certificate of Merit affirming that Plaintiff’s counsel had consulted with at

1 least one person with relevant and appropriate expertise who reviewed relevant data regarding lead
2 exposure, and that counsel believed there was meritorious and reasonable cause for a private
3 action.

4 38. After receiving the Notice, and to Plaintiff's best information and belief, none of
5 the noticed appropriate public enforcement agencies have commenced and diligently prosecuted a
6 cause of action against Defendant under Proposition 65 to enforce the alleged violations which are
7 the subject of the Notice.

8 39. Plaintiff is commencing this action more than sixty (60) days from the date of the
9 Notice to Defendant, as required by law.

10 **FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION**

11 **(By Plaintiff against Defendant for the Violation of Proposition 65)**

12 40. Plaintiff hereby repeats and incorporates by reference paragraphs 1 through 39 of
13 this Complaint as though fully set forth herein.

14 41. Defendant has manufactured, processed, marketed, distributed, offered to sell
15 and/or sold the Products in California since at least July 24, 2025.

16 42. On September 29, 2025, Plaintiff served the Notice on Defendant concerning the
17 exposure of California citizens to lead from consumption of the Products without proper warning,
18 subject to a private action to Defendant and to the California Attorney General's office and the
19 offices of the County District attorneys and City Attorneys for each city with a population greater
20 than 750,000 persons wherein the herein violations allegedly occurred.

21 43. The Notice gives Defendant actual knowledge of the potential consumer product
22 exposure requiring the warning pursuant to Cal. Code Regs, Tit. 27, § 25600.2. Consumption of
23 the Products will expose users and consumers thereof to lead, a hazardous chemical found on the
24 Proposition 65 list of chemicals known to be hazardous to human health.

25 44. The Products do not comply with the Proposition 65 warning requirements.

26 45. Plaintiff, based on his best information and belief, avers that at all relevant times
27 herein, and at least since September 29, 2025, continuing until the present, that Defendant has
28

1 continued to knowingly and intentionally expose California users and consumers of the Products
2 to lead without providing required warnings under Proposition 65.

3 46. Defendant continues to sell the Product under a brand or trademark that is owned
4 or licensed by Defendant or an affiliated entity; and/or Defendant has knowingly introduced lead
5 into the Product, or knowingly caused lead to be created in the Product; and/or Defendant has
6 covered, obscured or altered a warning label that has been affixed to the Product pursuant to §
7 25600.2(b); and/or Defendant has received a notice and warning materials for the exposure
8 pursuant to § 25600.2(b)-(c) and Defendant has sold the product without conspicuously posting or
9 displaying the warning; and/or Defendant has actual knowledge of the potential consumer product
10 exposure requiring the warning, and there is no manufacturer, producer, packager, importer,
11 supplier, or distributor of the Product who: (i) is a “person in the course of doing business under §
12 25249.11(b) of the Act, and (ii) has designated an agent for service of process in California, or has
13 a place of business in California

14 47. On January 1, 2026, more than five business days after Defendant received the
15 Notice, Plaintiff purchased the Product from Defendant. At the time of purchase, Defendant did
16 not provide a Proposition 65 compliant exposure warning.

17 48. The exposures that are the subject of the Notice result from the purchase,
18 acquisition, handling and recommended consumption of the Product. The primary route of
19 exposure to lead is through ingestion. When foods contaminated with lead are consumed, ingestion
20 of lead will occur which will increase blood lead levels. No clear and reasonable warning is
21 provided with the Products regarding the health hazards of exposure.

22 49. Plaintiff, based on his best information and belief, avers that such exposures will
23 continue every day until clear and reasonable warnings are provided to purchasers and consumers
24 or until this known toxic chemical is removed from the Products.

25 50. Defendant has knowledge that the normal and reasonably foreseeable consumption
26 of the Products exposes individuals to lead, and Defendant intends that exposures to lead will occur
27 by their deliberate, non-accidental participation in the importation, distribution, sale and offering
28 of the Products to consumers in California.

1 51. Plaintiff has engaged in good faith efforts to resolve the herein claims prior to this
2 Complaint.

3 52. Pursuant to Health and Safety Code § 25249.7(b), as a consequence of the above
4 described acts, Defendant is liable for a maximum civil penalty of \$2,500 per day per violation.

5 53. Pursuant to Health and Safety Code § 25249.7(a), this Court is specifically
6 authorized to grant injunctive relief in favor of Plaintiff and against Defendant.

7 **PRAYER FOR RELIEF**

8 WHEREFORE, Plaintiff demands judgment against Defendant and requests the following
9 relief:

10 A. That the court assess civil penalties against Defendant in the amount of \$2,500 per
11 day for each violation for up to 365 days in accordance with Health and Safety Code §
12 25249.7(b);

13 B. That the court preliminarily and permanently enjoin Defendant mandating
14 Proposition 65 compliant warnings on the Products;

15 C. That the court grant Plaintiff reasonable attorney's fees and costs of suit, in the
16 amount of \$50,000.00.

17 D. That the court grant any further relief as may be just and proper.

18 Dated: March 3, 2026

BRODSKY SMITH

19 By: 

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