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RIVERDALE - Girl Scouts say their peanut butter is OK

(by Donna Rolando - Managing Editor - January 28, 2009)

RIVERDALE - If you've been hankering for peanut butter cookies, the Girl Scouts of Northern New Jersey say there's no reason not to feed the craving with its products.

Since 1917, Girl Scouts have been selling cookies across the nation to raise money for troop activities, and even with the recent nationwide salmonella outbreak, the organization says it's not time to cut calories.

A recent press release from the Girl Scouts of Northern New Jersey stated that Girl Scout cookies, which are now on sale, are not affected by the salmonella scare.

Of the eight varieties of Girl Scout cookies on sale, two contain peanut butter – Peanut Butter Patties and Peanut Butter Sandwiches – and none of these cookies are a salmonella health risk, said Helen Wronski, president and CEO of the Girl Scouts of Northern New Jersey.

"We've been getting calls and e-mails and we've been addressing those," said Lynn Apolinaro, public relations director for Girl Scouts of Northern New Jersey.

She said those inquiries have come from volunteers working with the 32,000 Girl Scouts and 3,200 troops represented by the Girl Scouts of Northern New Jersey, which is based in Riverdale, but includes all of the state's northern region.

By issuing a press release about the cookies and also posting information on its Web site, the organization has been attempting to make sure that troops and Scouts can answer the public's questions about the cookies. In this way, the Girl Scouts' major fundraiser enjoys its usual success.

"We're trying to keep everyone as informed as possible," Apolinaro said.

In a press release about the salmonella outbreak, CEO Wronski explained that ABC Bakers-Interbake Foods does not use peanut butter from the sources that have been linked to salmonella.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) audited ABC Bakers' supplier, Hampton Farms, earlier this month and found no contamination in samples taken. The records supported Hampton Farms' reports that it has not shipped to or received peanut butter from Peanut Corp. of America, the only peanut butter manufacturer linked by the FDA to the salmonella spread.

"We want our customers to be assured that their purchases of Girl Scout cookies are safe and we value their support of our Girl Scouts," Wronski said.

Apolinaro said that most customers like to support the Girl Scouts and their programs.

"Of course people like the cookies but they want to support the Scouts," she said.

Peanut Butter Patties were the third biggest seller for the Girl Scouts last year, following Thin Mints and Caramel DeLites, she said.

"Since the current cookie orders are not in yet," she said, "we have no way of knowing which cookie varieties are our top selling varieties this year."

The group also has no way of knowing whether the salmonella scare is having an impact on the sale of these varieties.

Scouts will be taking orders for cookies through Feb. 1 with deliveries beginning in March. Cookie booths will be set up during March and April for additional sales. For more information about Girl Scout cookies, visit on the Web at gsnnj.org or call 973-248-8200.

The Girl Scout cookies are a way to not only raise money but teach girls how to manage inventory and money, set goals, and develop marketing skills.

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