Couple Files Wrongful Death Suit against Cheese Companies

LOS ANGELES (Business Wire) — A wrongful death lawsuit was filed last week against Forever Cheese, Inc., The Aniata Cheese Co., and Cookbook Los Angeles — the cheese importer, distributor and retailer whose Marte brand Frescolina ricotta salata cheese was identified as the source of a multi-state Listeria outbreak [1] in September.

The lawsuit was filed in Los Angeles County Superior Court (Case No. BC493201) on behalf of Joanna Valentine and Laurie Sorenson, whose infant son was born prematurely when Ms. Valentine became ill with a Listeria infection after eating the imported ricotta salata cheese. Ms. Valentine and Ms. Sorenson are represented by Marler Clark, the nation's leading law firm representing victims of foodborne illness [2], and the law offices of Gordon & Holmes and Richard Waite.

According to the couple's attorneys, Ms. Valentine, who was 25 weeks pregnant, consumed Listeria-contaminated ricotta salata cheese several times in the first week of September. She began experiencing symptoms of Listeria infection, including fatigue and back pain, on September 12. Over the next several days, her symptoms worsened and she was treated at an urgent care clinic. On September 18, Ms. Sorenson took Ms. Valentine to the emergency room, where she was rushed to labor and delivery for treatment.

Their son was born the next day, at 27 weeks gestation. Both he and Ms. Valentine's placenta tested positive for the same strain of Listeria that was isolated from samples of ricotta salata cheese imported by Forever Cheese. The baby remained hospitalized in the neonatal intensive care unit, where he was treated for a myriad of issues, including high blood pressure, kidney failure, spinal meningitis and bleeding around his brain, until October 4, 2012, when he passed away.

"Pregnant women are told to avoid eating unpasteurized dairy products to prevent exactly this type of situation. Joanna should have been able to trust that the pasteurized cheese product she purchased was safe to eat," said William Marler, attorney for the plaintiffs [3].

The lawsuit asks the court to award the plaintiffs damages for wage loss, medical expenses and other general damages, as well as punitive damages.

Marler Clark has represented thousands of victims of foodborne illness, including victims of Listeria outbreaks linked to cheese, milk, cantaloupes, and celery *[4], since 1993. The firm filed another* Listeria outbreak-related lawsuit against Forever Cheese *[5] in Washington State on September 25.*

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