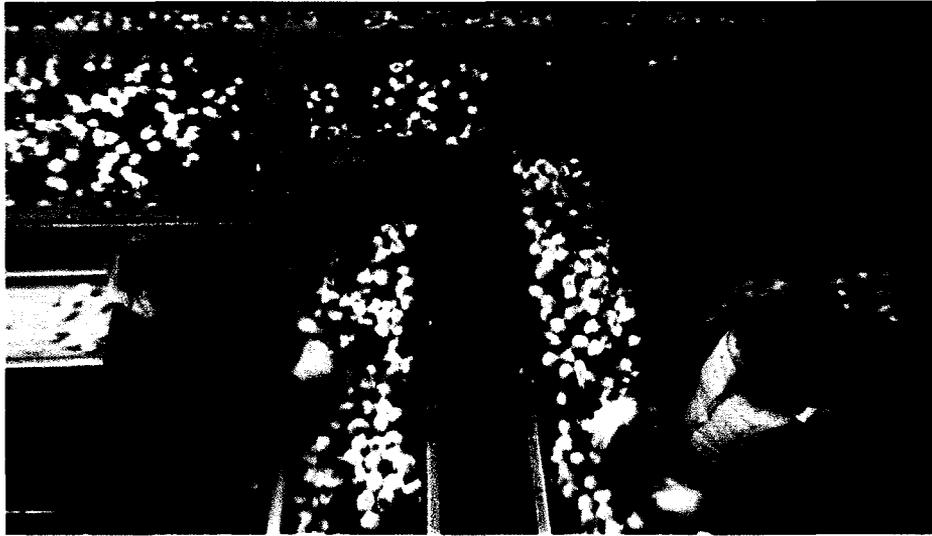


Christopher Ranch disputes accusations in Net²⁴flix show

BY BRAD KAVA -
JANUARY 11, 2018

• Like51





ROSSO'S
FURNITURE

60% OFF

**ALL FACTORY & STORE
CLOSEOUT ITEMS**

CLICK HERE

Facebook

Twitter

Google+
Share

Gilroy's Christopher Ranch, America's biggest garlic producer, disputes accusations that it conspired to fix garlic prices and sells garlic peeled by Chinese prisoners, allegations raised by competitors in a new Netflix documentary series investigating food scandals called "Rotten." The episode, called "Garlic Breath," shows what it alleges is undercover video taken in

Chinese prisons of workers peeling garlic – using their teeth in some cases, according to an undercover witness, to remove roots because the peeling had ruined the prisoners’ fingernails. The hidden camera video shows boxes marked with the Golden Lion brand, sold by Christopher.

Ken Christopher, the third-generation manager of the family-owned private company, this week denied the the documentary’s allegations. He said that Christopher, Gilroy’s biggest employer, is planning to file suit against Netflix asking it to stop showing the documentary and to issue a correction.

He said the company is overwhelmed by negative comments on social media as a result of the show. Christopher said his company has never sold garlic peeled by prisoners and 90 percent of the garlic it sells is from California. He said the company has no connection to the Golden Lion brand and that the video claiming to be filmed in prisons is a fake.

“The documentary is a hit piece on us,” said Christopher, whose family has grown, packed and marketed garlic in Gilroy since 1953. “We’re being dragged through the mud. I want to keep emphasizing, who we are is about California garlic. No Christopher Ranch product uses Chinese garlic. Having our integrity means so much to us.”

In the documentary, a U.S.-based garlic importer tells the filmmakers he sneaked a camera into a Chinese prison and observed prisoners peeling garlic, allowing companies to sell it at much lower prices than cloves peeled in the U.S. The documentary alleges that Christopher Ranch sells that garlic.

It also claims that Christopher has been working with a Harmoni Group, Inc., which is the only importer of overseas garlic that doesn’t have to pay tariffs on imported cloves.

Christopher said the company works with Harmoni because it doesn’t dump garlic in

the U.S. market, meaning it doesn't sell garlic for less than it costs to produce it, undercutting U.S. growers.

“Christopher Ranch, the nation's largest family-owned garlic company, is proud of our commitment to our customers and community to be both ethical and transparent regarding our business operations,” Christopher wrote in a Jan. 8 Facebook post. “We find it unfortunate that the new Netflix docuseries ‘Rotten’ has chosen to produce a show that highlights our brand in such a negative light.”

The company grows 90 percent of the 90 million pounds of garlic that it sells annually in the U.S. in California, sourcing the rest from Spain, Argentina, Mexico, and China,” he wrote.

“We source a limited amount of Chinese garlic from a US-based firm, Harmoni, and have found them to be a dependable supplier. We were aware of some allegations surrounding their labor practices last year, but U.S. Customs and

Border Protection investigated and cleared them of any wrongdoing.”

According to the documentary, small garlic producers can't survive if this large Chinese importer, Harmoni, is allowed to undercut prices.

“Currently, the wholesale price of garlic in China is \$1 a kilo, and this has enabled Harmoni Spice, the only garlic importer that pays no duty, to undercut U.S. producers for the past 10 years,” said Stanley Crawford, a New Mexican farmer who asked the Department of Commerce to review Harmoni's exemption from tariffs, in an article published by the Albuquerque Journal. “Anti-dumping duties, which can run as high as \$4.71 a kilo, would serve to level the playing field for U.S. producers, bringing the price of imported garlic in line with U.S. wholesale prices.”

The commerce department reviews companies suggested by an organization called the Fresh Garlic Producers

Association, of which Christopher Ranch is one of four members.

That organization annually withdraws its request for the regulatory agency to review Harmoni, according to the film, allowing Harmoni to exploit a loophole and avoid tariffs.

In June, the U.S. Department of Commerce threw out Crawford's request to investigate Harmoni, saying that Crawford had taken money from a competing Chinese garlic company and destroyed his credibility as a source. The film documents a battle between Crawford and his attorney and another boutique New Mexican garlic producer who first signed on with Crawford and then took money from Harmoni. Those battles prevented the Commerce Department from taking action.

U.S. Customs investigated the allegations of prisoners being used for the imported Harmoni garlic and found it to be untrue, Christopher said.

The “Rotten” series is produced by Zero Point Zero, the company behind Anthony Bourdain’s television shows.

“Our food supply system is broken, corrupt, dirty, inhumane, and riddled with fraud. If you are not aware of this, you need to be,” wrote Paste Magazine in a review of the series, calling it “mandatory” viewing for people who buy food.

Christopher said the company is considering a lawsuit and is also thinking about no longer importing any garlic from China. The reason it does so now, he said, is because some customers who can’t afford California garlic prefer the cheaper Chinese product.

Those imports are never sold under the Christopher name, he said, and when the company does use garlic from other countries to bridge the gap between harvests, it clearly labels its origin.

Christopher Ranch, with more than 600 full time workers and another 400 seasonal ones, is Gilroy’s biggest employer. The

company pays its agricultural workers above minimum wage, and company patriarch Don Christopher is noted for his philanthropy, which includes donating land and an endowment to fund the establishment of Christopher High School. Ken Christopher said the company would never knowingly use prison labor for its products.

“Absolutely not,” he said. “Not in a million years.”

Related