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Four Arrested in Basmati Rice Fraud Probe Led by Food Standards Agency

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— Categories: Crime



The Food Standards Agency (FSA) confirmed that authorities have arrested four individuals in connection with an ongoing investigation into the fraudulent sale of basmati rice in fake branded packaging.

The investigation, led by the FSA's National Food Crime Unit (NFCU), is focused on the illegal distribution of mixed rice being passed off as premium basmati, a practice that misleads consumers and threatens the integrity of the legitimate food market.

The operation began on July 23, when enforcement activity took place in Leicester with the involvement of local authorities and Leicestershire Police. Officers arrested a 48-year-old man on suspicion of fraud by misrepresentation and conspiracy to defraud. He was later released under investigation.

Further enforcement actions followed in London a week later. Officers from the NFCU, Metropolitan Police, Surrey Police, and local councils conducted coordinated visits to several premises. During this second wave of activity, a 56-year-old man and a 51-year-old woman from Croydon, along with another 48-year-old man from Epsom, were arrested on the same suspicion of fraud and conspiracy. All three have been released under investigation while enquiries continue.

A 52-year-old man from London also presented himself for a voluntary interview as part of the inquiry, which is centred on the deliberate mislabelling of large 10kg and 20kg bags of rice. These bags, containing mixed varieties, were found packaged to appear as premium basmati – a rice known for its fragrance, taste, and higher price point.

Officials clarified there is no public health threat associated with the rice, but the financial deception and disruption to fair market conditions are at the heart of the probe.

Neil Castle, deputy head of the National Food Crime Unit, stated: “The deliberate misrepresentation of legally imported bags of mixed rice as premium basmati products defrauds consumers and creates unfair competition for legitimate businesses. The arrests send a clear message that we will pursue those who seek to profit from deceiving consumers.”

While the criminal investigation is ongoing, recent checks on rice authenticity have added weight to concerns about food fraud. A targeted surveillance project found that several rice samples marketed as basmati contained more non-basmati varieties than permitted under industry standards.

Three of the 30 samples tested exceeded the 7 percent maximum threshold of non-basmati content set by the British Retail Consortium’s Code of Practice. These non-compliant samples had proportions of 17 percent, 32 percent, and one sample consisted entirely of non-basmati rice.

The Food Standards Agency encourages consumers to report any suspicions regarding the authenticity of food products. Those with concerns are advised to contact their local trading standards authority.

The investigation remains active, with authorities determined to tackle food crime and protect both shoppers and honest businesses from fraudulent practices that seek to exploit the trusted reputation of premium products like basmati rice.