Chipotle's Year From Hell-a-Peno

By Josh Bloom — December 9, 2015

When Chipotle execs gather for their year-end meeting, it is a pretty sure bet that Frank Sinatra's "It Was a Very Good Year" will *not* be playing in the elevators. It was anything but.

Ever since Chipotle's *self-righteous claim* [2] *(which isn't even true [3])* that the company was removing genetically modified ingredients from its food because "it doesn't align with [the company's] position," just about every conceivable thing went wrong. It's now a bit of a novelty to find a news day when they *haven't* poisoned *someone*.

The company's 2015 timeline reads like something from a Three Stooges episode:

- January 14th The company announced that it was *removing pork products* [4] from 600 of its restaurants because an internal audit found that one of their suppliers wasn't raising its pigs in accordance with company standards.
- April 26th The company announces that it will stop using any GM food. Officials are quite smug about it: According to Steve Ells, the founder and co-CEO of the company, *Just because food is served fast doesn't mean it has to be made with cheap raw ingredients, highly processed with preservatives and fillers and stabilizers and artificial colors and flavors.*

What this has to do with GM food is, well ... nothing. It's all hyperbole that, at the very least, suggests that GM *food* = garbage which is a big scientific *no-no*. It's was downhill from there.

Karma, anyone?

- September 11th Another cluster of food poison cases in Minnesota is traced back to contaminated tomatoes served in 17 restaurants. This time it is *salmonella* [5].
- November 2nd The company *shutters 43 restaurants* [6] in Oregon and Washington after an E. coli outbreak. The strain is identified as STEC O26, which produces Shiga-toxin.
- November 10th Restaurants in Oregon *plan to reopen* [7].
- December 4th The company announces an *enhanced food safety program* [8]. Just in time. Or maybe not.
December 8th 80 students became ill after eating at one restaurant. This time the culprit is the highly contagious norovirus, which was probably spread by one employee who worked while sick [9].

Somehow, the company managed to poison people with three different pathogens over a three-month period. Mighty impressive. But, perhaps more so is that all three are typically transmitted via that fecal-oral route [10]. For a company that is committed to selling “food with integrity [11],” instead of propagating scientific nonsense about GM foods, perhaps it might want to focus on getting its employees to wash their hands, and stay home when they are ill.