



U.S. Department of Justice

**Stephen J. Murphy
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Eastern District of Michigan**

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For Immediate Release:

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April 10, 2008

EVENT: Sentenced

Defendant: Bassam Salameh

DEARBORN MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO FOOD STAMP FRAUD

A 32-year-old Dearborn, Michigan resident pleaded guilty to an Indictment charging him with committing food stamp fraud in excess of \$5,000 United States Attorney Stephen J. Murphy announced today.

Pleading guilty before U.S. District Judge Nancy G. Edmunds was Bassam Salameh of Dearborn, Michigan.

The fraud arose when Salameh, an employee of the BP gas station and convenience store located at 15880 Livernois in Detroit, owned by Duke's Oil Corporation, began the practice of discounting food stamp benefits for cash. The food stamp recipients would provide their electronic benefit transfer cards, which are like credit cards and commonly known as Bridge cards, at the convenience store and the defendant would enter a certain amount of charges, for example \$100, as authorized purchases of food items, but provide \$75 in cash to the recipient instead. Food stamp benefits are to be used only for eligible food products. During the period of April 2003 through September 2004, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which funds the food stamp program, calculated the total of fraudulent food stamp transactions conducted at the Livernois BP station to be \$156,300.

United States Attorney Stephen J. Murphy stated that, "The food stamp program is designed to insure that the most needy in our community are able to obtain the basic food necessities not only for themselves but for their families to survive. Discounting food stamp benefits for cash is takes away money that was intended to buy food for the poor and perpetrates a fraud on the taxpayers who pay for this family assistance program. Our office considers it very important to maintain the public's confidence in the food stamp program and stamp out any waste and abuse. Violators of the food stamp laws will be prosecuted."

The count to which defendant pleaded guilty, carries a maximum sentence of 20 years imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine. Salameh's sentencing is scheduled for August 14, 2008 at 2 p.m.

The investigation of this case has been conducted by Special Agent Mark McCluthey of the Office of Inspector General for the U.S. Department of Agriculture and prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Ross I. MacKenzie.