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Thursday, December 8, 2016

## Longtime fugitive sentenced to more than four years in prison for \$3 million food stamp fraud

A longtime fugitive was sentenced to more than four years in prison for stealing \$3.2 million through food stamp fraud more than two decades ago, U.S. Attorney Carole S. Rendon said.

Najeh Ottallah, 54, formerly of Lakewood, was sentenced to 54 months in prison. U.S. District Court Judge Donald Nugent also ordered Ottallah to pay \$3.2 million in restitution to the Department of Agriculture, which administers the food stamp program, and \$35,576 to the Internal Revenue Service.

Ottallah pleaded guilty in 1994 to food stamp fraud and tax charges. He did not appear for his sentencing and was a fugitive until this year, when he was arrested in Jerusalem.

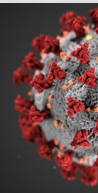
"This defendant ripped off taxpayers by abusing a program designed to help our most destitute," Rendon said. "He fled the country for more than two decades and the sentence he received today reflects those actions."

"More than 20 years passed since Mr. Ottallah pleaded guilty for his role in what was, at the time, one of the first investigations of a massive food stamp fraud scheme in Northern Ohio," said Kathy A. Enstrom, Special Agent in Charge, IRS Criminal Investigation, Cincinnati Field Office. "Today's sentence is a direct result of the collaborative efforts of the IRS, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of Inspector General, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and the U.S. Attorney's Office in combating violations of federal law."

This case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Karrie D. Howard following an

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investigation by the IRS and U.S. Department of Agriculture, with assistance from the U.S. Marshal Service.

**Topic(s):**  
Financial Fraud  
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**Component(s):**  
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