

## **Jury acquits Tyson, managers;**

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## **Body**

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A federal **jury acquitted Tyson** Foods and three **managers** yesterday of **hiring illegal immigrants** from Mexico and Central America as part of a nationwide conspiracy to boost production and **profit**.

The **jury** deliberated for less than a day before **acquitting** on all charges.

"The verdict confirms that **Tyson** Foods made a concerted effort to **hire** properly and abide by the law," company spokesman Gary Michelson said in a statement.

**Tyson** executives testified during the seven-week trial that **Tyson** did not encourage the **hiring** of **illegal** workers and said **managers** who did so acted against corporate **policies**. However, two former **managers** who were indicted but entered plea deals testified that they were doing what the company demanded when they went along with the **hiring** of **illegal** workers.

In closing statements Tuesday, a company attorney said the defendants were victims of an imperfect government system of screening immigrants and there was **no** conspiracy at the Springdale, Ark.-based meat company.

Earlier, Assistant **U.S.** Attorney John MacCoon said **Tyson's** top executives knew **illegal** workers were being **hired** at poultry plants.

"Headquarters had a million red flags that things were not right," MacCoon said.

Since the case began, the judge dismissed 24 of 36 charges stemming from a three-year undercover investigation of **Tyson**.

In all, six **managers** were charged along with **Tyson** in a December 2001 indictment. One fatally shot himself a few months later, and two others made plea agreements in January and testified for the government.

Robert Hash, 50, a regional vice president and the highest-ranking **Tyson** official currently on trial, had faced seven charges, including two conspiracy counts.

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A single conspiracy charge had remained against plant manager Keith Snyder, 44. Another defendant, Gerald Lankford, 64, had been accused of conspiring to violate immigration laws and obstruct their enforcement.

The managers had faced jail time and fines if found guilty. A conviction on the charge of conspiring to defraud and obstruct enforcement of immigration laws carries a maximum sentence of five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

The verdict was returned while the stock market was still open. In trading on the New York Stock Exchange, Tyson shares fell 18 cents to \$7.97.

## Classification

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**Company:** TYSON FOODS INC (58%); NEW YORK STOCK EXCHANGE LLC (52%)

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