

Early PCB detection proposed by USDA

NEW YORK - Over 50,000 pounds of egg products, 399,000 pounds of chicken and 15,000 pounds of fresh pork, potentially contaminated by polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB), were withheld from consumer channels by the U.S. Department of Agriculture after its residue monitoring program revealed the contamination, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Carol Tucker Foreman said.

In testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations of the House Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee, Foreman said the chronology of events after the discovery of the contamination "demonstrates both the strengths and weaknesses in the administration of our monitoring programs."

"Our system detected the residue, enabled us to alert other agencies and aided in identifying the source of contamination."

"The industry has the responsibility for offering safe products to the consumer. Since accidents like this do occur, the government monitors the food channels to insure the safety of the food supply," she said.

Foreman said there are certain weaknesses within the government system. "We are taking steps to correct the shortcomings," she said.

Among changes Foreman proposed as a result of the incident are:

- Developing a rapid test method for residues,
- Implementing more effective and efficient inspection techniques, including plant-operated quality control systems,
- Expanding research to find more suitable test methods for drug chemical residues.

--Clairying joint

jurisdictions between FSQS and the Food and Drug Administration, and the Environmental Protection Agency.

--Improving internal communication within the department, and

--Intensifying sampling of retail products to determine any potential contamination.

"In light of this incident, it is clear that the department must give special attention to environmental contaminants in the food supply. We should have far more sensitivity to the potential gravity of this type of contamination," Foreman said.

A July 6 chicken tissue sample taken under the department's national residue program showed high levels of PCB. In following up on the scope of contamination, investigators with the department's Food Safety and Quality Service (FSQS) traced the contaminated poultry and egg products to nine states.

The source of contamination was a leaking transformer in a storage

shed at the Pierce Packing Co., Billings, Mont., where an unknown amount of PCB, used as a coolant liquid in the transformer, leaked into the plant's waste water system. Pierce dredges the waste water for inedible byproducts to be used in meat meal, an animal feed ingredient.

Foreman said the value of an industry-run quality control program was clearly illustrated in the recent PCB contamination incident.

"It was through such a voluntary program that one of the plants discovered the presence of PCB contamination in poultry," she said. "The company voluntarily held the contaminated product that would otherwise have entered the marketplace." The firm reported the results to FSQS which condemned the product after confirmatory tests, she said.

Foreman said the department is considering asking for legislative authority to help it more effectively contain residues at the source of contamination.

PSU judging team wins top honors

UNIVERSITY PARK - Penn State won top honors in the Intercollegiate Livestock Judging Contest held recently at the Eastern States Exposition, West Springfield, Mass.

The Penn State team consisted of Signe Edvar, State College; Phil Welhausen, New Castle; Mary Fazio, Pittsburgh; Don Wilson, Summerhill; and Kathy Listwak, New Kensington.

Contestants evaluated 12 classes of beef cattle, swine and sheep and presented oral reasons for placing six classes of livestock.

High scoring individual in the contest was Bruce Foster of Michigan State. From the Penn State team, Phil Welhausen placed sixth overall and Mary Fazio was ninth. Mary also was fifth in sheep judging. Signe Edvar placed fourth in swine judging, helping the team to a 36 point first place in swine competition.

Other team members competing for individual honors were: Gregg Bard, Lewistown; Jeannie Bucher, Ridely Park; Ben Stern, Chester Springs; C.H.

McCutcheon, New Wilmington; and Janet Kauffman, Harrisburg.

The team competed at the Eastern National Livestock Show, Timonium, Maryland

on October 6. They are coached by Dr. Erskine H. Cash and graduate assistants Daniel D. Loy of Roseville, Ill., and Robert W. Grove of Somerville, Va.

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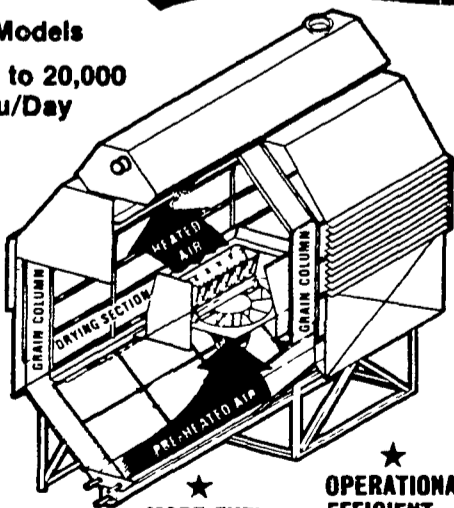
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