

Three firms begin testing voluntary quality proposal

NEW YORK, N.Y. — Three firms are testing the U.S. Department of Agriculture's proposal that USDA inspectors in meat and poultry processing plants be permitted to use data from the plant's department-approved quality control systems during the inspection process.

Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Carol Tucker Foreman said she is "very encouraged" by the pilot programs at Peter Echrich and Sons, Chicago — a manufacturer of sausages and specialty processed meats; the Kroger Co., Salem, Va. — a distribution center for Kroger grocery stores where meat products are cut, boned and

packaged; and Tyson Foods, Monet, Mo. — a packager and shipper of fresh whole chickens and chicken parts.

"We are off to an excellent start in these three plants and expect 12 more plants to participate in providing us with data on the concept," Foreman said. "We are confident this program will not only improve overall consumer protection, but will do so in an efficient and economical fashion."

"Within the next few months," she said, "USDA will establish as many as 12 additional pilot projects in processing plants throughout the country, with each test project expected to last about four months."

Additional pilot projects

are being considered at S. Clyde Weaver, East Petersburg, Pa.; Berks Packing Co., Reading, Pa.; Holly Farms, Wilkesboro, N.C.; Saluto Foods, Montgomery, Ala.; Edwards Sausage, Lawrenceburg, Ky.; Armour, Ft. Madison, Iowa; Oscar Mayer, Sherman, Texas; Portion Trol, Mansfield, Texas; Cudahy, Denver, Colo.; and Safeway, Stockton, Calif.

USDA proposed a voluntary quality control program for meat and poultry processors Sept. 14. The pilot project will test the idea behind the proposal.

Foreman said the pilot project will provide USDA's Food Safety and Quality Service with detailed in-

formation on the operation of quality control programs in both large and small plants and in plants with various types of processing operations, including processed, cured and smoked meats, canning and prepackaging of raw poultry.

"From the correspondence coming to USDA, it's obvious there's some confusion about USDA's responsibility under the quality control program," Foreman said, "including the misconception that inspectors will be removed altogether from plants that have such programs."

"Under no circumstances is USDA relinquishing its

responsibility to assure consumers that meat and poultry products are safe, wholesome and truthfully labeled as required in the inspection laws."

"This pilot program will help USDA design a strong monitoring program, that includes daily visits to plants by USDA inspectors, which will meet those responsibilities," she said.

The proposed regulation being tested would permit USDA inspectors in processing plants to use data from department-approved quality control systems operated by the plants.

USDA approval would be based on ability of the system to assure production of products in compliance with USDA requirements for safety and labeling.

"We appreciate the cooperation of industry in establishing the pilot projects," Foreman said. "We feel industry-operated quality control programs can help our inspection system and improve consumer protection. Inspectors will be able to make more informed decisions because they will have more objective information."

The proposal will apply only to inspection of plant operations where meat and poultry is boned, cut-up or further processed into products such as soups,

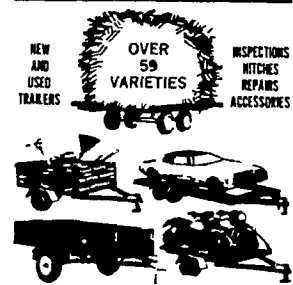
frozen dinners, franks, bologna and other cold cuts. It will not apply to inspection of slaughtering operations.

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African swine disease threatens U.S.

WASHINGTON, D.C. — African swine fever, deadly viral disease of pigs that is threatening to invade the United States, has cut market supplies of pork in the Dominican Republic by 20 to 25 percent, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The disease was discovered in the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Brazil in 1978-79, and could easily spread into this country, said F. J. Mulhern, administrator of USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

"If an outbreak should occur in the United States," he said, "it is probable that this highly contagious disease would spread rapidly to all sections of the country—unless immediate steps were taken to control it."

Plans for a U.S. emergency ASF eradication program have already been developed. State and federal animal health authorities will go to work immediately upon confirmation of a domestic outbreak. But the fever strain active in the Dominican Republic is difficult to find and diagnose.

Mulhern is urging all U.S. hog producers to be alert for sick pigs and to call their veterinarians immediately for diagnosis.

This is only the second time that ASF has penetrated the Western

Hemisphere. The first time was in 1971 in Cuba, when over one-third of the island's swine either died or were destroyed so as to wipe out the disease.

"The effects of such mass death and slaughter in this country are unimaginable," Mulhern said, "especially in this day of rising food prices."

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations estimates there are only one-third as many live

pigs in the Dominican Republic now as there were before ASF infected the country.

To help stop entry of ASF into this country, U.S. Customs and APHIS officials are cooperating in inspecting all pork-related products entering the United States.

Additional inspectors have been added in Puerto Rico, the New England area, New Jersey and Texas to increase surveillance over garbage-

feeding premises. ASF can spread in garbage fed to hogs if it contained infected pork scraps not cooked to kill the virus.

APHIS also is cooperating with FAO, the Agency for International Development and the Dominican Republic in a pilot eradication program in that country. At present, slaughter of exposed animals is the only eradication technique, since no effective vaccine has been developed and no treatment is known.

Truck prices too high? - Try trading corn

LANCASTER — If you're having a hard time finding a market for your corn or wheat, you might be interested in a new "grain" dealer in town.

Lancaster has a truck dealer with a new sales angle — he buys corn and wheat and the truck it's brought in on, when he sells you a new truck.

Dick Fetters, general manager for Larry Murphy Chevrolet, Old Harrisburg Pike, said that he is buying corn and wheat for \$5.50 a bushel and is selling it to Pennfield for \$2.85 per bushel.

So far, Fetters said, they have sold about six trucks to farmers who traded their

grain and truck on a new pick-up or stake frame truck that was in stock.

When asked why they were paying more for the grain and selling it for less, Fetters said their business was indebted to the farmers of Lancaster County and the surrounding area.

"With the international crisis going on, and the grain embargoes in effect, we wanted to help out," said the general manager.

He said this grain trading on new trucks will be going on until the end of February.

"After the grain, I might try the same thing with milk," Fetters added. SM

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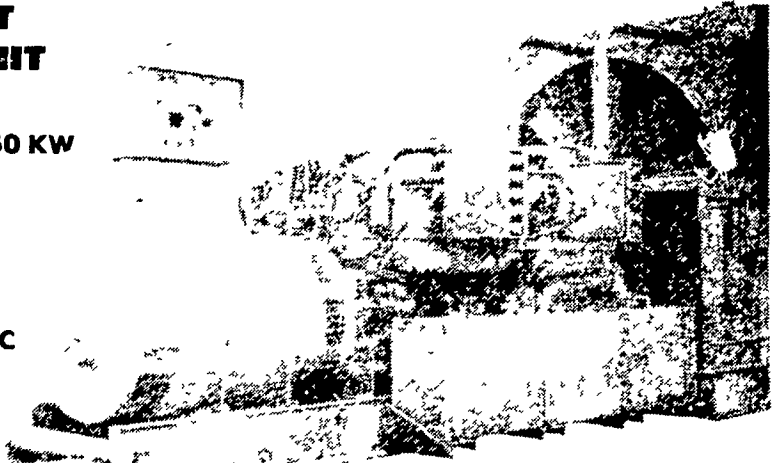
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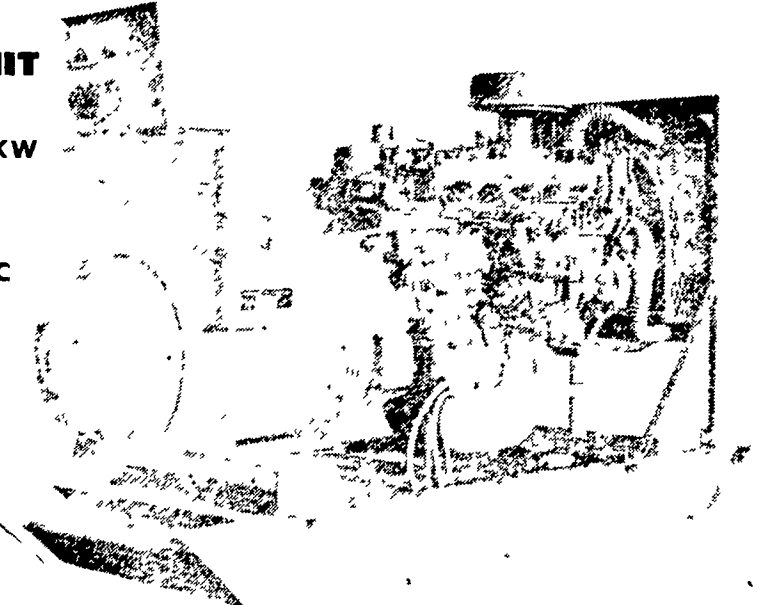


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