

USDA investigates suspect Australian meat imports

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The U.S. Department of Agriculture has ordered its inspection force to seek out shipments of beef imported from an Australian slaughter plant because they may contain horsemeat. The department has also asked the cooperation of private meat industry representatives in

locating meat from the plant. "We have seized all suspect meat that has been found and we are actively tracing the remainder," said Donald L. Houston, administrator of USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service. The department has initiated action to delist the plant, thereby blocking

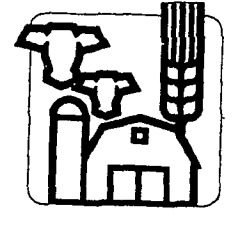
further imports, he said. "At the request of FSIS, the department's Office of the Inspector General has begun an intensive investigation to determine the extent to which equine meat may have illicitly entered this country," he said. Houston said that preliminary

test results on boned, boxed beef intended for further processing in this country indicate adulteration of two lots (bulk shipments) by equine meat. The product apparently was imported from Establishment 140C (Profreeze), a slaughter plant near Melbourne, Australia.

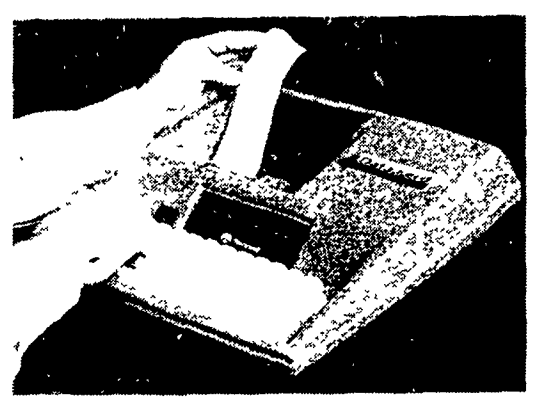
Houston said that equine meat was first discovered in a 605-case lot of boneless beef at Foodmaker, Inc., a meat processing plant in San Diego, Calif. Subsequent testing revealed that a second shipment of the Australian firm's boneless beef, awaiting entry into this country at the Port of Los Angeles, also contained equine meat.

The Australian government announced that it has suspended all exports from the plant pending further test results, and has pledged full cooperation in the investigation.

"Since January 1, 1981, some 45 shipments of meat from the plant have been imported into the United States," Houston said. "Product from those lots is being sought out for species analysis."



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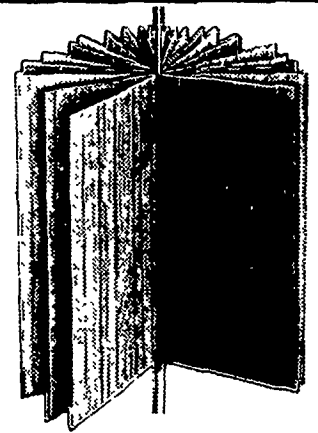
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