

# False health records spawn much tragedy

WASHINGTON, D.C. — "False disease records can have tragic effects for personal lives, people's businesses and for entire industries," explains Bert W. Hawkins, administrator of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

"These tragedies surprise some people who forge government forms to save themselves time and trouble. They think that no one but a few bureaucrats are affected. That is far from the truth.

"A recent case in point involves multiple violations by Ernest Mendel and his family's business, Albert Mendel and Sons, Inc., of Patterson, N.Y. They were indicted on 52 counts of misrepresenting the health status of cows and making false statements regarding blood samples taken from these cows. Stipulated expert testimony established that blood samples used in tests for brucellosis were taken from two healthy bulls - not from Mendel's cows," Hawkins said.

Brucellosis causes aborted calves, breeding problems, and lower milk yields. Annual economic losses to the beef and dairy industries are estimated at more than \$32 million. The disease can be spread to humans, where it is called undulant fever.

## Undulant fever

Several cases of cattle infected

with brucellosis, as well as one case of undulant fever, were traced to cows shipped by Mendel. The human disease is almost unknown in New York today, although it was fairly common before stringent health measures went into effect.

Dr. Alfred E. Brewer of Lakeville, N.Y., was surprised when he saw the symptoms in one of his farmer-patients in 1979. The man reported feeling strangely weak and feverish, and the symptoms reminded Dr. Brewer of symptoms that he hadn't seen since he first started practicing medicine in 1940. Undulant fever! he thought. Tests confirmed his diagnosis.

"I had purchased some cattle two or three weeks earlier," the farmer, Ted Upson of Lakeville, was quoted in press reports at the time. "But I didn't know there was a problem.

Indeed there was a problem. Besides the damage to his own health, Upson's entire dairy herd had to be killed because of the disease. "The mental strain of starting over is more than people realize," Upson said.

Brucellosis broke out in several New York locations in 1977 and continued through January 1981. New York previously had been brucellosis-free for many years, and officials of the state's department of agriculture believe that

Mendel was responsible in part for the recurrence. A costly program succeeded in again eradicating brucellosis from New York.

## Herds slaughtered

Entire herds had to be slaughtered, not only in New York but also in other nearby and far-off locations, including Massachusetts and Puerto Rico. Sick cattle also were exported as far as Mexico and Iran.

Because of the widespread damage caused by Mendel's falsifications, severe actions were taken. First, Mendel and his firm lost their state license to trade cattle in New York for two years, starting in 1979, and they were fined \$500,000 by the state.

Also in 1979, Dr. Charles Frumerie, a private veterinarian practicing in Pawling, N.Y., lost his federal accreditation to perform official testing of livestock for one year because of his involve-

ment in the Mendel case. Mendel's falsifications were made on blank state and federal health certificates presigned illegally by Dr. Frumerie.

## Large fines

Finally, federal court action began with a grand-jury indictment in February of 1983. Mendel was found guilty on 23 counts of falsified documentation. On March 6, 1984, Federal District Judge Whitman Knapp of New York, N.Y., sentenced Mendel to a year and a day in prison plus three years of probation and a fine of \$50,000. The family firm was fined an additional \$100,000. The federal court decision is being appealed.

"These penalties are more than justified, in my opinion," said APHIS's Bert Hawkins. "I have been in the cattle business for many years, and I know that most people cooperate the best they can

with regulations, which are meant to stop disease. Whenever possible, we try to enforce animal health laws by educating people to their responsibilities. But we intend to prosecute those who intentionally break the law.

"At the moment, I am encouraged by the progress we have made in controlling and wiping out cattle brucellosis. Fifteen states and parts of two others and the Virgin Islands are classified brucellosis-free, meaning that there have been no known infected herds for a year or longer. Twenty other states have herd infection rates of a quarter of one percent or less. The remaining states have made considerable recent progress. If people understand the rules and obey them, brucellosis will be eradicated from all the states, and tragedies like the ones caused by the Mendel's will not recur."

## Market line back in Md.

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — The "MDA Market Line" news service went into service again on Monday for its second season of providing five-day-a-week reports on crops, weather, prices and availability of fresh fruits and vegetables.

Here's the weekly lineup of reports: Monday- Crop and Weather summary information; Tuesday- farm prices, inventory, planting intentions, etc.; Wednesday- Highlights of the weekly supermarket price survey; Thursday- excerpts from the "Maryland Feed and Grain Report"; and Friday- updated information on fruit and vegetable crop and supply conditions in Maryland.

Information carried in the reports is from the Maryland-Delaware Crop Reporting Service

and the Maryland Department of Agriculture, Marketing Services Section.

Reports consist of a three-minute taped program which can be accessed by calling (301) 841-5763 and are put on line at 4 p.m. each day. The fruit and vegetable report is left on the line through the weekend to enable consumers to plan their buying and picking trips.

According to Bradley H. Powers, Chief of the Marketing Services Section of the Maryland Department of Agriculture, "we initiated the service in 1983 and found that it proved helpful to many consumers and farmers and served as an economical means of getting timely information out so that people could make use of it in their planning."

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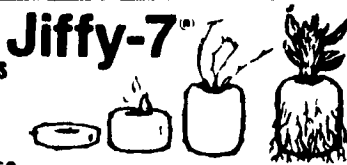


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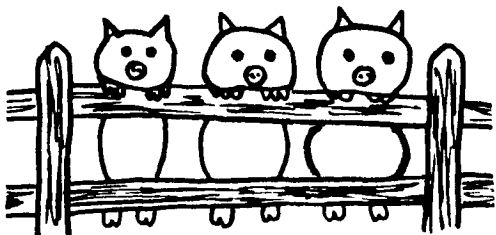
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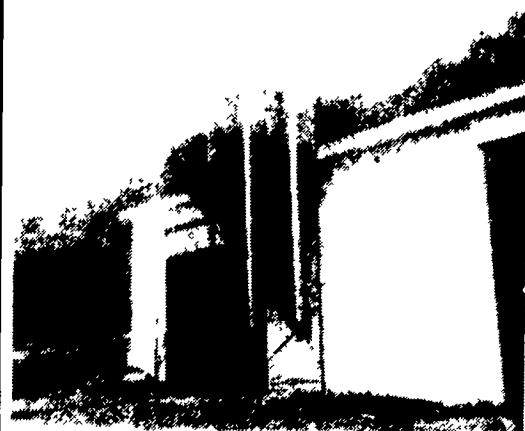


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