PCB-IN-POULTRY CRISIS ABATES WITH FINDINGS BELOW GUIDELINE

Worried Department of Agriculture officials last week were holding back a decision on the need to certify poultry from plants in 10 southeastern States as a result of contamination from polychlorinated biphenyls that inadvertently leaked into fish meal (See FOOD CHEMICAL NEWS, July 26, Page 42).

First reports from 170 samples indicated that all results were below the Food and Drug Administration's 5 p.p.m. guideline. Several hundred more samples were being analyzed in USDA laboratories in San Francisco and Washington. Pending completion of these analyses, CMS ordered continued sampling of poultry from producers at a rate of two samples per flock, estimated at between 3,000 and 8,000 birds.

Estimates of the number of birds involved ranged to hundreds of millions, based on figures that 60 million broilers are started each week in the 10 States involved, and they stay ~~on feed for nine weeks~~.

Hundreds of Millions of Birds Involved in Problem

An estimated 800,000 tons of fish meal contaminated with PCBs had been shipped between April and the discovery by FDA in mid-July of the leak that caused the contamination. The States involved are Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Alabama, Florida, Tennessee, Delaware, Mississippi, Virginia, and Kentucky. FDA has recalled about 1,000 tons, and may get back another 4,000 tons, but most of the contaminated fish meal has already been used in feed.

If the analyses continue below the guideline, Consumer and Marketing Service officials intend to keep a close watch on poultry processing, but will not institute a certification program that would require USDA clearance before the birds could be shipped for processing.

Officials of Holly Farms, whose problems with hatchability of eggs led FDA to the discovery of the leak at the South Pacific Products' East Coast Terminal Co., Wilmington, N.C., reported destruction of 77,000 broilers after finding levels of PCBs above the guideline.

FDA's recall of feed involved 64 firms, including 37 poultry producers who received PCB-contaminated feeds. Others included feed mills, truckers, brokers, and the like.

FDA also announced that it was sticking by its current policy that prohibits re-processing of contaminated foods for use in feeds for food animals. It may be used for feed for non-food animals, or in fertilizer or industrial products.

Complicating the poultry producers' problems is the current rail stoppages, which have all but curtailed shipment of feed supplies to broiler producers in Georgia and the Carolinas.

The PCB episode was met with a new blast from Rep. Ryan (D-N.Y.) at the Environmental Protection Agency, FDA, USDA for not prohibiting use of the substances. He revised an earlier bill (HR 8576) with a new version (HR 10085) introduced July 26 taking away exemptions for closed system use of PCBs (See FOOD CHEMICAL NEWS, May 24, Page 22).

Results of 24 analyses on swine were also below the guideline, according to the first report released by USDA.

"All the evidence indicated that consumers have been buying a wholesome product and can continue to buy and enjoy chicken with confidence," Dr. Clayton Yuetter, CMS Administrator, declared in a reassuring statement announcing the test results.

Although asked to aid in the analyses, FDA, because of the demands on its facilities, has been unable to assist USDA in checking for PCBs in poultry.

Consumer crusader Ralph Nader, testifying before Chairman Magnuson's (D-Wash.) Commerce Committee hearings on product safety (See story, Page 36), charged that USDA should have informed the American people about the poultry problem earlier, saying they did not see fit to do so "apparently because they did not want to upset" the market.

Urging Congress to adopt provisions to hold civil servants accountable for failure to act, Nader complained that if some people are harmed as a result of the PCBs in poultry, "what will be the sanctions applied to the USDA officials who made this decision?" "None," he said.

He urged that government workers be liable to penalties ranging from fines to demotion or firing.

RETENTION AID CLEARED FOR PAPER MANUFACTURE

The Food Additive Order for components of paper and paperboard in contact with aqueous and fatty foods was amended July 28 to clear use of poly((methylimino)(2-hydroxytrimethylene)hydrochloride) as a retention aid employed prior to the sheet-forming operation.

The clearance under §121.2526 came on a Petition filed by American Cyanamid (See FOOD CHEMICAL NEWS, Sept. 14, Page 21), which was amended Jan. 28. By cross-reference, the clearance also applies to §121.2571 for components of paper and paperboard in contact with dry food.

The additive is to be produced by reaction of 1:1 molar ratio of methylamine and epichlorohydrin so that a 31% aqueous solution at 25°C. has a Stokes viscosity range of 2.4-4.0 as determined by AFTM Method D 1545-63. It is to be used in such an amount that the finished paper and paperboard will contain the additive at a level not in excess of 1% by weight of the dry paper and paperboard.