Statesman 10/21/75

USDA clears pork packer in PCB probe

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A federal official confirmed Monday that meat samples from Independent Meat Co., Twin Falls, show no sign of PCB contamination and as far as he's concerned, there's no reason why Independent's pork products can't be purchased by the public.

Preliminary tests several days ago also indicated that pork products processed recently at the Twin Falls plant did not contain toxic PCBs.

Independent, a small packing operation, was caught up in the aftermath of PCB contamination at a Billings, Mont., packing plant.

Federal officials say the Montana firm sent out animal feed contaminated by PCB, a banned chemical suspected of causing cancer.

The feed, in turn, was purchased by Ambrose Farms, Wendell, which supplies hogs to Independent Meat.

Federal officials last week announced in Washington that 16,000 pounds of pork from an Idaho packing plant was being held until it could be checked for PCB contamination.

But Dr. L.G. Rafoth, director of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's meat and poultry inspection program for Western states, said a check of samples from the plant shows no PCB contamination.

Both samples from the plant and Independent meat samples taken off grocers' shelves were tested.

Rafoth said he regretted that Independent got caught up in the check for PCB contamination. "That's a little plant and they really had nothing to do with it," he said.

"They're really taking a beating. The plant manager called me this morning and said they're almost out of business because people won't buy their stuff," Rafoth said.

Meanwhile, an Oregon Department of Agriculture official reported that an FDA survey conducted in supermarkets from Minneapolis to Seattle found 3 out of 92 samples tested had PCB concentrations exceeding federal health standards.

John Valterza said 3 other samples showed traces of PCBs below the standard and the rest were negative.

Initial reports did not indicate where the contaminated samples were found. The FDA said it will release the full results today.

Contaminated Food Found on Shelves

SALEM, Ore. (AP) — The concentration of PCB in three of 92 samples of food from supermarket shelves in a weekend survey exceeded federal health standards, an Oregon official said Monday.

The survey was conducted in supermarkets from Minneapolis to Seattle and it is not clear where the contaminated samples were found, said John Valterza, a spokesman for the Oregon Department of Agriculture. Among the products sampled were ham, sausage, eggs and poultry.

Valterza said the amounts ranged from .56 parts per million to 1.5 ppm. The federal safety standard is .3 ppm, he said.

Three other samples showed traces of PCBs below the standard and the rest were negative, Valterza said.

PCB (polychlorinated biphenyl) once was used as a coolant in electrical equipment. It has since been banned. The substance has been shown to cause cancer in laboratory animals and skin disease on humans.

"So far as we know, nothing has been found in Oregon," Valterza said.

Last month, 600 pounds of shelled frozen egg meats were destroyed in Baker after it was determined they were contaminated by PCB. The shipment came from Pocatello, Idaho. State officials said that is the only known PCB problem in Oregon.

Millions of eggs and thousands of chickens throughout the Northwest have been destroyed in recent weeks because of excessive amounts of PCB. The contamination has been linked to a punctured transformer at a packing plant in Billings, Mont.

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