PCB level 'far below tolerance'

Idaho Statesman 9/22/77

Idaho inspectors clear hog feed

By JERRY SASS

The Idaho Statesman

About 21,000 pounds of hog feed at the Ambrose Farms in Wendell was spiked of PCB contamination was cleared by the Idaho Agriculture Department Friday.

Meat processed from Ambrose Farms' hogs, however, still is being tested for PCB concentration.

Idaho Agriculture Department Director Wilson Kellogg informed Ambrose Farms the feed test showed a PCB level "far below tolerance."

Further, Kellogg said, normally only 5 or 6 percent feed is mixed with 95 percent soybeans or grain for animal feed, which would further dilute any PCB concentration.

Ambrose Farms owner Neal Ambrose was not available for comment Friday.

The feed tested was part of a 48,000 pound lot bought by Ambrose from Pierce Packing Co., in Billings, Mont., where a PCB leak was identified by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration Sunday. The farm had fed 27,000 pounds of the feed to its hogs, which then were sold to Independent Meat Co. in Twin Falls.

"We feel the situation has eased," Kellogg said. "We only sampled what feed was left in the lot (on the farm), though."

Kellogg, however, said Ambrose Farms' hogs may have been fed contaminated feed earlier.

"I doubt it, though," he said. "I think Ambrose will be cleared. By the same token, so would the Independent."

Kellogg said he told Independent about the test results. The meat packing company had purchased 81 hogs a week ago from Ambrose Farms.

But Independent voluntarily is holding pork that came from Ambrose Farms for testing by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Dr. Robert Haskell of the USDA Meat and Poultry Inspection Division said Independent officials had cooperated with the government testing.

Haskell said the agency won't determine until the middle of next week whether the meat is contaminated because samples were shipped to San Francisco for tests. The meat being tested is sold to supermarkets under the Falls Brand label, Haskell said.

Pat Florence, manager of Independent, said he had "no information" about the testing. He said no meat had been quarantined by federal or state agencies.

"Our meat has never been detained," Florence said. "Several stores stopped selling it because of public pressure, but we have had no pressure from the government to recall our meat."

Feed purchased from Pierce and meat from animals that ate the feed at packing plants are being tested in 14 Western states by 12 USDA investigators. Results of the tests won't be

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PCBs

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analyzed until early next week, federal officials said.

V.L. Hutchings, director of the USDA Western Regional Compliance Office in San Francisco, said the list of farms that received possibly contaminated feed from Pierce is growing steadily.

Earlier this week, the FDA said it had obtained a list of all buyers from Pierce, including 2 buyers in Idaho, 2 in Washington and some in other states.

However, Hutchings said the search expanded after the FDA turned the list over to his office Thursday.

"Everyone we call, we find out they sold a little bit to someone else," Hutchings said.

Hutchings wouldn't say whether other Idaho farms in Idaho are being checked.

The Twin Falls company is one of many packing plants that may be under USDA scrutiny, Hutchings said.

"We are possibly checking other plants and other brands," he said, but refused to name any firms.

He said no results from meat and feed samples being taken are available.

Two Idaho supermarket chains, Albertson's and Smith's Food King, said they withdrew Falls Brand meats from sale Thursday.

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PAGE 2G — Sunday, September 23, 1979

"A Part of Life in Idaho"

The PCB delays

It's easy to issue a blanket condemnation of the government officials who conducted the notoriously protracted chicken and egg investigation — too easy. To a degree, some of the delays can be justified. Others were inexcusable.

It all depends on who knew what when. The distinction is that which separates the routine from the alarming, and the date to keep in mind is Aug. 3.

Much attention has focused on a U.S. Department of Agriculture inspector who, on July 6, left contaminated chicken samples in a refrigerator for 10 days while he went on vacation. The July 6 samples were part of a routine, random inspection. At that point, there was no reason to believe anything was amiss. To that extent, the inspector's conscience is clear. But a system that allows public exposure to contaminants while its employees vacation is wanting. What if the contaminant had been arsenic? Federal inspection procedures need to be revised to prevent such a delay from happening again.

The vacation and a heavy workload in the USDA's San Francisco laboratories, where the samples eventually were sent, delayed testing. Again, no one was guilty of ignoring a hazard. The samples still fell under the category of routine.

Until Aug. 3. That was the day PCB levels were discovered in quantities 4 times greater than the federal Food and Drug Administration's acceptable level. It was also the day routine procedures should have gone out the window. Unfortunately, that wasn't the case.

The USDA's Western regional office was notified of the test results by phone the same day, yet regional officials waited 12 days, until Aug. 15, to inform the state and FDA. To date there has been no explanation for this, the first of a series of reprehensible delays.

The FDA proceeded to fritter away 5 more days before sending investigators to the scene, the Ritewood Egg Co., in Franklin. That takes us to Aug. 20. It was 9 more days before the investigators, previously preoccupied with air, water and other samples, turned their attention to eggs. Another 5 days passed before lab tests of the eggs, on Sept. 3, revealed nearly 10 times the legal limit of PCB.

These delays cannot be emphasized too strongly. The officials involved knew the situation wasn't routine. The San Francisco tests proved that beyond a doubt. Yet it took an entire month from the time contaminants were confirmed in San Francisco until they were confirmed in Idaho eggs.

Even then, state and federal officials failed to tell the public what was going on. The information didn't become public for more than a week — and then only because news reporters began their own investigations. Even the stores that were selling the contaminated eggs didn't know.

Not all the official behavior is blameworthy, but a disturbing portion of it is appalling. That the officials involved need to change their attitudes is beyond doubt, and their procedures could do with an overhaul as well.

Fortunately, Congress is breathing down their necks. It is to be hoped that the congressional investigation is better than the one that precipitated it.

Portrait of a disti...



Coralie Weston

MONS 011044

Columnist admit...

WASHINGTON — It's own up time.
I was wrong.
I admit it because of 2 columnists now have a speech and one gave me an example.
Last May, David Broder, the esteemed political reporter of *The Washington Post*, told the National Press Club that the public was fed up with politicians in general and with the Supreme Court's busing decision in particular. We all should [illegible]

Mar...
McGro...