PCB-Articles

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Turkeys Bear Contaminant

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An unusually high level of hydrocarbon contaminants have been found in turkeys raised in northern Minnesota, forcing approximately 30,000 birds off the market.

The discovery was the first find of the contaminant called "pcb" in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's northern district, the Pioneer Press learned Wednesday.

The contaminant — polychlorinated biphenols — was first discovered by the USDA this June in a feed processing plant in North Carolina. The artificial chemical substance was in fish meal which was fed to turkeys in the U.S. seaboard states.

Dr. Lynn Runquist, assistant deputy director of the USDA northern region, said the hydrocarbon is similar to DDT and other insecticides. It is not easily destroyed once consumed, remaining in bones and fatty tissue.

Meat and poultry inspectors made the first serious detection of the hydrocarbon contaminant in the northern district about three weeks ago in a flock owned by the Peterson-Biddick Co. at Wadena, Minn.

On a few other occasions, small amounts of eggs had previously shown the contaminant within the district of Montana, Wyoming, North and South Dakota, Minnesota and Wisconsin, Dr. Runquist said.

However, the Peterson-Biddick flock is the first poultry or livestock ordered held by the USDA for having more than the "pcb" tolerance level set by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

Officials of the elevator and turkey farm company at Wadena refused to discuss what it plans to do with the turkeys, although a USDA official said the individual turkeys will be inspected so the firm may not lose the entire amount now frozen from the market.

"We're marketing turkeys right along," a spokesman for the firm said. "All other information you'll have to get from the USDA."

"Farming of any kind is a gamble," Dr. Runquist said. "What has happened here is an accidental contamination of the turkeys' food and we are investigating to try to find the source."

Two or three other farms in the Wadena-Detroit Lakes area may be affected by the contamination, he said.

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