Mink Rancher Losing His Herd to PCB'd Feed

Idaho Statesman 10/31/79

PROVO, Utah (AP) — Mink rancher Dwight Ladle says he's losing six to 20 of his herd daily as a result of PCB contamination, and experts survivors among his breeding stock to become sterile.

Ladle, who has 1,500 minks, said Tuesday he fed them chicken byproduct purchased from a Provo firm where PCB contamination was found. Some of the animals had 14 times the amount considered lethal to the fur-bearing mammals.

Dr. Donald Thomas, director of the Utah State University branch animal lab at Ironton, said test samples from the Ladle ranch were found to contain high concentrations of PCB in the fatty tissue.

"After years of building up my animal herd from around 200 females to 1,500 today, I face the prospect of having to pelt out my entire stock and start from scratch," said Ladle.

Thomas said the animals will eliminate some of the chemical, but some is stored in the fatty tissues for as long as three years, if the animal survives.

He said in three of the animals tested, PCB was found at the level of 22 parts per million in body fat. He said PCB also was found in kidneys and livers.

Thomas said a dosage of two parts per million is toxic to mink over a six-month period. He said, however, it is unknown what effect the contamination will have on Ladle's mink operation.

"No one seems to know if the animals can eliminate enough of the chemical to overcome the contamination. We'll have to wait and see," he said.

The toxic chemical was first discovered at a Billings, Mont., packing plant which produces the feed. A Franklin, Idaho, company purchased the feed, fed it to chickens, which were sold to the Provo firm for processing.

Andrew Jolley, manager of Jolley Poultry Co., said there was a four-day period when chickens from the Idaho firm were processed.

"Everything was caught before any part of it went into human consumption," said Jolley.

He said Ladle was the only mink rancher to purchase the offal byproducts from his company.

Ladle, who has ranched minks since 1940, said it has been his practice to grind and mix his own mink feed on his ranch.

Idaho Statesman 11/2/79

Utahan says minks died from PCBs

By LONNIE ROSENWALD
The Idaho Statesman

Minks that ate chicken parts contaminated with PCBs are dying from liver and bladder disease on a Provo, Utah, ranch, the ranch owner said.

Harris Ladle said Wednesday that more than 400 of his animals have died since mid-July, when he fed them feed from a Provo poultry slaughter plant where poultry inspectors found PCBs in chickens July 6.

James Schoenfeld of the Utah Department of Agriculture told The Statesman that department tests have found up to 18 parts per million of PCBs in degenerated, though not necessarily cancerous, livers and kidneys of 3 of Ladle's minks.

Ladle said he mixed feed for his 1,500 animals using chicken entrails from the Jolly Poultry Co. in Provo. He said Jolly told him 2½ weeks ago the entrails came from processed contaminated chickens from the Ritewood Egg Co. in Franklin.

When USDA inspectors found PCBs in chickens at Jolly during a routine inspection, the chickens were withheld from sale, Jolly owner Andrew Jolly said.

In September, Ritewood destroyed 375,000 chickens after they were found to be contaminated at levels between 15 and 65 parts per million.

Jolly said Ladle is the only mink rancher who purchased any of the contaminated bird byproducts. But the federal Food and Drug Administration is investigating whether feed was sold elsewhere, FDA investigating supervisor Leroy Gomez said Wednesday.

Schoenfeld said minks are delicate and thus are vulnerable to the effects of PCBs. A 1970 study done at Michigan State University found that mink productivity decreased from PCB contamination, and that minks died when PCB levels in their bodies reached 2 ppm.

Ladle said he may have to destroy his entire breeding stock, developed over 29 years of mink ranching.

"This terminates a dream my father and I have had for years, to develop a herd that could support us and our families."

He estimated losses between $14,000 and $20,000 from the minks that have already died, and probably more if the herd is further damaged.

"The frustrating thing is we don't know whether this will affect the 'furring out' or the fertility of the minks," Ladle said.

The PCB contamination began at the Pierce Packing Co. in Billings, Mont., where the chemical leaked from a ruptured electrical transformer into a pool of pork residue that was added to meat meal. The feed then was sold to Ritewood and other poultry and hog farms.

PCBs frequently were used in transformers as a cooling and lubricating agent until they were banned by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. EPA scientists concluded that long-term exposure to the poison could result in skin lesions and liver disorders.

MONS 011027