The Evening Star
WASHINGTON, D. C.
D, $18,026 SUN. 352,408
AUG 13 1971

PAGE A-1

U.S. Seizes 75,000 Contaminated Eggs

By ROBERT WALTERS
Star Staff Writer

Federal officials in Norfolk, Va., today seized more than 75,000 eggs found to be contaminated with the same industrial chemical which led to a flurry of concern last month over the wholesomeness of broiler chickens on the retail market.

At the same time, government agents made five seizures in four locations of feed used in catfish production in the South. In the case of both products, the action was taken by officials of the Food and Drug Administration.

The actions represent the first time the government has used its seizure power in connection with the discovery last month that an industrial chemical had contaminated 16,000 tons of fish meal at a North Carolina plant.

Voluntary Action

During the investigation of chicken contamination, the firm which is the country's largest producer of broiler chickens slaughtered 77,000 fowl, but that action was a voluntary one rather than imposed through government legal actions.

The government's decision to order the eggs and catfish feed off the market was first disclosed by Peter Schuck, an associate of consumer advocate Ralph Nader, and later confirmed by an FDA spokesman, who emphasized that there was no known immediate danger to consumers.

The chemical involved is polychlorinated biphenyl, commonly known as PBC and similar to DDT. PCB is not known to be specifically dangerous to human beings, but in experience on mice repeated dosages have led to birth defects and liver damage.

The eggs seized today were shipped by Central Carolina Farms, Inc., of Durham, N.C., to two Norfolk firms. The largest batch, 6,270 dozen, was confiscated at the plant of

See EGGS, Page A-10

EGGS

Continued From Page A-1

Blase & Console, while another 90 dozen were seized at Valley Poultry and Producers.

The FDA's "action level"—the point at which it believes the product poses a potential danger to humans—is 0.5 parts of PCB per million for eggs. The eggs in the Norfolk warehouses ranged up to 1.9 parts pr million of PCB.

The eggs sampled by the FDA, according to Schuck, were those from egg and poultry producers which had purchased fish meal, used in chicken feed, from East Coast Terminal, in Wilmington, N.C.

East Coast Terminal discovered last month that, as a result of leaky equipment in its processing plant, the fish meal it shipped to various users contained 15 to 20 parts per million of PCB. The FDA level for safe consumption of the chemical in chicken meat is 5 parts per million.

In eggs, however, the tolerance level established by the government is 0.5 parts per million, and Schuck said that the FDA had found that level was exceeded in 20 of the 56 samples examined by federal inspectors.

According to Schuck, the contaminated samples produced evidence of PCB at levels as high as 0.8 to 1.9 parts per million. Each of the samples consisted of 1,500 dozen to 2,400 dozen eggs, he said.

The fish meal suspected of being contaminated with PCB was distributed by East Coast Terminal over a period of 3½ months to approximately 65 firms throughout the Southeastern states, including Virginia.

Chemical Undetected

Federal officials found that the PCB, an industrial chemical, leaked from a heat exchanger into processed fish meal at the Wilmington (N.C.) plant. The fish meal then was mixed with other ingredients to make up chicken feed.

The PCB leak went undetected from late April to mid-July, contaminating an estimated 16,000 tons of fish meal—a component which makes up approximately 2 percent of chicken feed.

Initially, millions of chickens were feared tainted, but the Agriculture Department launched a hurried test program and determined that the chickens available on the retail market did not contain levels of chemical residue high enough to harm consumers.

The 77,000 chickens which were destroyed were grown by Holly Farms, the nation's largest producer of chickens, after officials of that firm found a high level of PCB in the fowl.

MONS 033556