

Companies recall eggs, animal feed

Statesman News Services

A Montana poultry company recalled hundreds of thousands of possibly contaminated eggs Monday, and a Utah company continued removing some of its eggs from Salt Lake City supermarket shelves.

Meanwhile, Pierce Packing Co. in Billings, Mont., where toxic PCBs leaked into chicken feed that is suspected of contaminating both poultry and eggs, has asked for the return of 1.9 million pounds of suspect meat meal feed sold in 8 states since the beginning of June.

A Portland, Ore., specialty firm began dismantling Pierce's feed-processing equipment, where the banned chemical apparently leaked from a transformer into animal feed.

Pierce President Ken Poggi said the source of the PCB had been traced to the transformer, which was ruptured by a loading vehicle in June.

The plant's meal production is continuing, but sales have stopped pending official clearance, Poggi said.

The contamination at Pierce has necessitated destruction of hundreds of thousands of chickens and eggs in Idaho and Utah.

FDA Regional Director Leroy Gomez of Denver said the Ritewood Egg Co in Franklin, Idaho, was the only Idaho feed buyer to receive bad feed. Idaho chemical experts will

(See PCBs, Page 7A)

PCBs-----

(Continued from Page 1A)

launch a precautionary examination of feed samples at feed dealers throughout the state this week to make sure no PCBs are present, Dr. Rod Awe of the Department of Agriculture announced Monday.

Ritewood, which learned of the contamination in mid-August, has already destroyed most of its chicken flock and thousands of eggs.

Gerald Bookey, owner of Cherry Lake Farms in Three Forks, Mont., told the Statesman his firm, which sells 105,000 eggs a day to supermarkets throughout Montana, asked its buyers to return their eggs in exchange for uncontaminated eggs from other farms.

"We're highly suspect of contamination. We are acting to test the eggs," said Bookey, whose farm uses protein meal from Pierce.

Another Pierce customer, Oakdell Farms in Riverton, Utah, has also recalled eggs from Salt Lake City supermarkets. Oakdell Manager Bruce Moller said the firm began tracking down 300 dozen eggs last Monday, when it received test results showing PCBs in its eggs.

Both companies said they don't know whether the eggs contain PCBs.

"We're pulling back to make people feel better," Moller said.

Bookey said he first learned of the feed contamination 2 weeks ago, but refused to say how.

"I just got wind of it," he said.

Bookey estimated losses to his company, which is a subsidiary of the National Food Corp. of Seattle, would be "astronomical." He added Cherry Lane will go to court to recoup some of its losses.

"There'll be lawsuits, that's for sure," he said.

He was critical of Pierce management for not cooperating with his efforts to learn the extent of the contamination.

"It was very difficult to get information because they wouldn't return our phone calls," he said.

Ritewood also is checking on liability in connection with the contamination, which cost it 270,000 chickens and thousands of eggs.

Ritewood attorney Lowell Castleton said he is investigating a possible basis for government liability, "because of the delay in notifying us" of the contamination.

Ritewood and Cherry Lane are insured for claims made against them, but not for chickens and eggs they've had to destroy, according to the companies. Castleton estimated those losses will reach \$1 million.

(Detection of toxic PCBs in chickens and eggs from an eastern Idaho egg company was slowed for 10 days while a U.S. Departmental of Agriculture worker went on vacation, Page 1B.)

FDA checks for PCBs in hog feed

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The Idaho Statesman

WENDELL — U.S. Food and Drug Administration officials Wednesday confirmed they were checking for PCB contamination in animal feed that was fed to hogs on one of Idaho's largest hog farms. The hogs have been processed and sold to supermarkets.

Mike Williams, the FDA's regional supervisory investigator in Seattle, said the FDA on Wednesday collected samples of feed suspected of containing PCBs at Ambrose Farms, Wendell. Williams said the test results were expected Friday.

Williams said Ambrose fed its hogs 27,000 pounds of feed purchased from the Pierce Packing Co., Billings, Mont., where PCBs were found last week. Ambrose has sold 300 hogs that ate the feed, Williams said.

Neither the FDA nor Neal Ambrose, owner of Ambrose Farms, would say who purchased the hogs. But the Independent Meat Co. of Twin Falls said it bought 81 of the Ambrose hogs.

Independent manager Pat Florence said the hogs "have already been slaughtered, processed and sold" to supermarkets.

Independent markets its processed foods under the Falls Brand label in many Western states. Florence said some meats also were sold to meat packers in other parts of the country.

The USDA will test unbutchered hogs and bologna, salami and other pork products at Independent today for PCB contamination, said Robert Haskell, USDA regional director of meat and poultry inspection in Salem, Ore.

Haskell said that if contaminated pork was found at Independent, the USDA would order meats already sold to supermarkets "off the shelves."

PCBs — polychlorinated biphenyls — are chemicals used in electrical transformers and heat-resistant oils and paints. The manufacture of PCBs was banned by the federal Environmental Protection Agency on July 2 because of health hazards.

The FDA thinks PCBs began leaking sometime after June 9 from a ruptured electrical transformer at Pierce into pork scraps that later were sold as animal feed in 8 states.

So far, Ritewood Egg Co. in Franklin is the only known Idaho buyer of the contaminated feed.

Florence said Ambrose stopped selling pork to Independent on Monday because of the feed problem.

Ten days ago, Florence asked USDA inspectors whether Independent's meat might have been contaminated. He said he was told his plant "could keep operating under normal inspection procedures." Normal inspection does not include PCB testing, USDA officials said.

Ambrose on Aug. 18 received 48,000 pounds of feed from Pierce. The remaining 21,000 pounds of feed is being held by the farm.

Florence said the 81 hogs it purchased from Ambrose represented 6 percent of the pork it slaughtered during the week the purchases were made.

Last year the packing company produced 2.5 million pounds of fresh pork, 2.5 million pounds of cured pork and 3.5 million pounds of processed bologna, salami, hot dogs and sausage, which was sold under the Falls Brand trademark.

"Depending on where they come from, the hogs are butchered within a week to 10 days," Florence said. Processed fresh pork is sent to market within 2 days, he said.

Meanwhile, health officials Wednesday took blood tests of Pierce employees in Billings and residents of Franklin, the town near Ritewood where chickens and eggs contaminated with PCBs were discovered in August, to determine whether they were contaminated with PCBs.