Holly Farms Tells of Experience with PCB Residues in Broiler Feeds

Feedstuffs Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON -- Chemical residues in foods, and how industry and government can cooperate to prevent contaminants in the food supply was the subject of a spirited panel discussion at the 17th annual National Broiler Council meeting here.

Dr. Kenneth May, quality control director, Holly Farms Poultry Industries, Wilkesboro, N.C., told of his firm's recent experience with PCB residues and how it worked with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Food & Drug Administration to get at the heart of the problem.

PCB residues in the firm's feed came from contaminated fish meal. It was discovered by Holly Farms when it noticed decreased mortality and hatchability in its flocks. The situation was confined to a few farms which received their feed deliveries on the same date. After discovering the problem, May met immediately with the firm's executive committee and recommended sampling every eight and nine week-old flock being grown-out by the company. Service crews then worked for two days to gather samples. May then called USDA's Consumer & Marketing Service on a Friday and flew to Washington the next Monday to present the sampling figures. FDA was contacted at the same time, and began a testing program of feeds in North Carolina.

Lessons Learned

May said that both the broiler industry and government took a beating in the press, although the consumer was well-protected from any contaminated product. May said the experience taught him this lesson:

1. Don't wait to get caught.
2. Government can't guarantee wholesomeness of all food.
3. The press delights on the consumers' natural fear of contaminated foods.

Each company must assume responsibility for assuring quality of its products, May said, and there must be a two-way communication with government. He added that the broiler industry must work on presenting a positive image of the industry to the press. It might be pointed out, for example, that chicken is the only food which has become less expensive in the last 25 years.

Dr. Harry Mussman, director of laboratory services division, Consumer & Marketing Service, USDA, complimented Holly Farms for the manner in which it handled the PCB problem. Mussman also called for better communication between government agencies and between government and the academic community.

Dr. Harold Buyens, Swift Dairy & Poultry Co., Chicago, suggested that in his inventive genius, man seems to be creating problems which challenge his ability to find solutions. New technology brings problems, he said, referring to PCB, DDT, cyclamates, arsenicals and DES. However, Buyens said, there is a common goal of industry and government: safe and wholesome food for consumers.

He called for more cooperative testing and evaluation between private and public agencies. Such cooperation, Buyens said, would keep the press from over-reacting on food contamination issues and would give a better foundation for dealing with legislative problems. As an example of the type of cooperation needed, Buyens referred to a recent meeting of 40 federal and industry scientists who worked on improved methodology for PCB sampling.

Gen. Fred Delmore, in charge of voluntary compliance in the FDA commissioner's office, told the broilermen that better government business communication would preclude many problems. FDA, he said, has an "open door" policy and is anxious to give full cooperation to industry in the form of guidelines and counsel. He encouraged industrymen to present problems frankly and openly to FDA district offices, and, if they don't get satisfaction there, to take the case to FDA headquarters. Delmore said there is an industry service division in each of the FDA bureaus, including the Bureau of Veterinary Medicine.

MONS 032707