Maker Erred in Chicken-PCB Incident

By JAMES WELSH
Star Staff Writer

"We thought it was a petroleum plant."

This was the explanation Monsanto Corp. gave the Food and Drug Administration as to why chemical substances called PCBs were still used in the processing of food — in this case fish meal to be used as a component for chicken feed.

Last week the FDA, the Agriculture Department, Monsanto and the general public all got a scare about the discovery at a North Carolina plant that the PCBs over a ten-week period had leaked into enough fish meal to contaminate millions of chickens, fowl and swine marketed through much of the East Coast, including Washington.

It turned out countless birds had indeed been tainted but not to the point deemed unsafe by FDA tolerance limits.

The Nixon Administration is preparing to cite the chicken-contamination episode as graphic proof of the need for its Toxic Substances Act, a measure that would permit tight regulation of both the manufacture and the use of such chemicals as the DDT-like polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB).

At least one Congressman, Rep. William Fitts Ryan, D-N.Y., wants to ban use of the chemical altogether.

It remains to be seen whether Monsanto, the nation's sole manufacturer of PCB, will respond to all this by saying in public what it told FDA in private about the fish-meal contamination.

Monsanto told the federal agency the accident wouldn't have happened but for an oversight in the chemical firm's St. Louis headquarters.

One FDA official recalled, "They told me that for some time now they've been getting rid of PCBs in all industrial equipment involved with food processing. But they overlooked the North Carolina plant because of its name."

The name of the firm is East Coast Terminal.

It could be a trucking firm, or a shipping line, or a petroleum operation.

"Monsanto told us someone in the home office, going over the list of customers for PCBs, assumed East Coast Terminal was a petroleum plant," said the FDA official.

Elmer Wheeler, manager for environmental health at Monsanto, said Monsanto promised a year ago it would stop selling PCB for use in food-processing industries, as well as for use as an ingredient in pesticides, paints, plastics and other products. Since then, he said, his firm was sure it had eliminated the use of PCB at all food-processing plants.

The discovery that the chemical was not only used but was leaking into processed fish meal came as a "total surprise" to Monsanto, said Wheeler.

Interpreting the name East Coast Terminal as that of a petroleum plant apparently occurred, said Wheeler, because PCBs are commonly used in closed systems, such as heat transfer units, in the petroleum industry.

East Coast Terminal, located in Wilmington, N.C., is a subsidiary of South Pacific Proteins, a Darien, Conn., corporation that imports large amounts of fish meal from Peruvian coastal waters. In the processing plants, the fish meal is heated to assure the removal of bacteria such as salmonella. This accounts for the use of heat-exchange equipment that might contain PCBs.

The leak was discovered after a large poultry firm traced the cause of why eggs weren't hatching properly. Monsanto was called in, and on July 16 it notified FDA.

Tests conducted by FDA showed the fish meal contained 15 to 30 parts per million of the chemical, well above FDA's tolerance limit of 5 parts per million.

Since the fish meal is used as only 2 percent of chicken feed, it was certain that an enormous amount of chicken feed and poultry was affected. But the dilution also was a saving factor, pulling the contamination level of the feed well below 1 part per million. Even though some birds ate this feed through their entire growing period, most did not store up enough of the chemical to go over the FDA safety limit.

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A thought for the week

by L.P. Saffore



Building for Eternity is the only real lasting joy of life. Temporal enjoyment pursued with the using and sometimes leaves remorse because of sin. Life is but a shadow as expressed by solomon in 1st Chronicles Ch 29 V 15. "Our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding." Let us make our brief stay on this earth as fruitful for God as possible, and as stated in Romans Ch. 12 V 1, . . . "That ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." This complete consecration to the service of God, after we have given ourselves to Him, in penitent prayer and dedication, will produce real joy here on earth and in the end Eternal reward in heaven. Seek God's will for your life by searching the Scriptures, praying daily, and attending Church regularly.

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