NEWS

May 388-3285
McDavid 388-4026

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

PCB CONTAMINATION OF MIDWEST TURKEYS ISOLATED, USDA REPORTS:

WASHINGTON, Sept. 29--The U.S. Department of Agriculture today reported that, based on results of intensified testing in a 3-State area of the Midwest, the contamination by polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) of some 50,000 turkeys in Minnesota was an isolated occurrence.

USDA's Consumer and Marketing Service is reducing its testing in Minnesota and the Dakotas accordingly.

Seven lots of turkeys, about 50,000 birds, were retained in cold storage warehouses in August when USDA's Consumer and Marketing Service found them to contain PCB levels that exceed the Food and Drug Administration administrative guideline of 5 parts per million in edible tissue.

All the turkeys were produced, under grower contracts, by a single company and consumed feed produced by the company's mill in Wadena, Minn. The mill's output of feed is used only for the one company's turkeys.

C&MS officials said results of tests by a private laboratory -- and confirmed by C&MS laboratories -- on live turkeys at eight farms that contract with the company show that no birds exceed the FDA administrative guidelines.

Samples from turkeys produced by other growers in Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota also were within acceptable levels.

C&MS has tested egg products from 19 plants in the 3-State area and also including northwest Iowa and northeast Nebraska to determine whether these products were contaminated. All 38 samples were below FDA's maximum acceptable level for egg products of 0.5 ppm.

-more-

In the Southeast, where C&MS found PCB contamination in poultry and egg products (USDA press release 2438-71), the agency is continuing its testing program. In that instance of PCB contamination, the problem was traced to a Wilmington, N.C., plant, where the industrial chemical accidentally leaked from heating equipment into fish meal being processed for feed.

Since C&MS began the three-phase testing in the Southeast in late July, 1,076 tests have been run on chickens, 331 on turkeys, and 218 on hogs. As a result of farm pre-testing, about 165,000 hens and broilers were destroyed before leaving the farms. Also found in violation were one turkey sample, representing 250,000 pounds; one hog sample (one hog); and three chicken samples (75,000 pounds).

USDA has made 654 tests of egg products in the Southeast, retaining 11 lots (133,200 pounds) that showed PCB levels in excess of an FDA maximum acceptable level of 0.5 ppm.

Commenting on the intensified PCB monitoring in the Midwest and Southeast, Dr. Clayton Yeutter, Administrator of C&MS, praised laboratory personnel of his agency, of USDA's Agricultural Research Service, and the Environmental Protection Agency for "extra efforts put forth to achieve prompt analyses of samples. Much of the time since we began intensified testing for PCBs in July," he said, "six of our laboratories have been on 16-hour, double shifts, 6 days a week. At no time during this period have we experienced more than a 1-day backlog in analyzing samples, and the laboratories have continued their regular support for the inspection program."

- - - - -

USDA 3206-71

pleased that minor instance was isolated - hopes never again a Carolina situation -

MONS 033510