Egg Men Told PCB Publicity Cost Industry $1 Million

By ROBERT H. BROWN
Feedstuffs Southeastern Correspondent

TIFTON, GA. — "Adverse publicity created by the PCB scare cost the poultry industry about $1 million in the month of August," Dr. John Shutze, University of Georgia poultry scientist, told commercial egg men attending the Georgia Commercial Egg Short Course.

The industry further found itself unable to refute the accusations because it lacked money to support research for data on PCBs, Shutze said. "The PCB thing is a good example of how vulnerable the industry really is," he noted.

Dr. Jerry Cox, egg marketing specialist at the university, said the PCB incidents coupled with television reports linking cholesterol and heart conditions dropped egg prices 8c per dozen, reflecting consumer reaction during that week. He said the egg consumption decline has been estimated at 3-4% and as high as 20% in some areas as a result of the two consumer scares.

"Thousands of dozens of eggs had no home and spent hens could not be sold. Breakers wouldn't buy eggs unless they were guaranteed to be PCB free, and hen slaughtering plants didn't want hens," he said. "There was no unified effort made to offset the adverse publicity, either," he noted.

Dairymen Act

Cox pointed out that the American Dairy Assn., acting on behalf of its members, instituted a major television advertising campaign to sell grade A milk during the PCB scare and cholesterol furor. "Unlike the dairies, the poultry industry did not have the money to fund TV and print advertising," Cox said.

Shutze said that dairy industry persons were also affected by the PCB situation, but reacted with an advertising campaign to sell their product. "The dairy people encountered problems. They had sealed thousands of silos with paint containing PCBs. Many silos and dairy herds were put out of business. One company erected about 4,000 silos that had been sealed with that type paint," he said.

Never before has the industry so acutely needed money for research, promotion and education as today, said James Fleming of United Egg Producers because "never before has the egg industry been so attacked by the news media and others."

"One of the big problems is that the egg industry has not been telling its story simply because it hasn't had the money to do the job," he said, in explaining the program for a national checkoff to raise funds to do the job.

The egg market dropped 5c a dozen, he said, because of the PCB publicity and this was the equivalent of $6 million a week. After the national TV show on cholesterol, he said, the egg market dropped 8-10c. And yet, he said, there is no unified opinion within the medical world about the relationship of eggs and cholesterol.

Marketing Order

Fleming said the UEP program to secure a marketing order for a national check off to gather funds for needed research, promotion and education is gaining support. He noted that such a program would have been ideal to combat the PCB incidents. A seventh draft of the proposal, which UEP is attempting to guide through this session of Congress, is now being prepared, according to Fleming. "We hope that this revision is ready sometime this month," he said. He hastened to add that this marketing order for check off does not call for production controls.

In a related action, the Southeastern Poultry & Egg Assn. board of directors approved in principle a compulsory financing program for research and promotion for the egg industry, with final approval subject to a review of legislation to be introduced.

Fleming conceded that the PCB incidents have spurred research work on the compounds, and the poultry industry does know a little more about the chemicals.

Even though PCBs have been widely used in many products, the poultry industry is just now becoming aware of them, according to Shutze.

PCBs and DDT

Previously PCBs have not been too much of a problem, and compared with DDT the chemicals have been found 600 times less toxic as DDT as far as trout are concerned. Recent studies with DDT on prisoners who were fed 35 mg. per day for two years with no adverse affects. Some of the recipients were checked as many as seven years after the experiments, Shutze said.

"DDT may have been kicked in the teeth a little unjustly. I'm not saying we should pollute the air with DDT, but I think we can get carried away. I think we are being subjected to 'shock treatment' — to scare us. When you tell people there is no clean air, no clean water then people start to listen. I don't know whether we can become conditioned to this or not, but a lot of people respond," he said.

He gave results of tests on contaminated fish meal which was analyzed to show 16.3 ppm. PCB. Fed to breeder hens it was found that body fat was running about 36 ppm. Eggs were running about 2.6 ppm. The allowable tolerance in birds is 5 ppm. and in eggs 0.5 ppm. "At this level, we got a zero hatchability. We followed these birds after pulling out the fish meal and the concentration got 1.6 ppm. with about 20% hatchability."

There is considerable difficulty in analyzing for the PCBs, Shutze said. In the case of DDT, when tested it shows generally throughout, but with PCB, because of the nature of the chemical, testers get a number of variances. In 15 samples taken on one farm, the tests did not come out evenly in the fish meal, indicating the PCBs do not infiltrate the meal uniformly.

Shutze ventured the opinion that DDT and other chemicals may have been blamed in the past for reactions properly attributable to PCBs.

In poultry, some of the PCB reaction symptoms are slight accumulations of fluid around the heart, accumulated fluids in abdominal cavities, kidney damage and exudates of brownish appearing materials. However, liver damage appears to be the principal one. The liver shows a pasty yellow, with blotches and some lesions.

PCB contaminations may have been higher in the Southeast than in other areas, especially with layers, due to selenium deficiencies, he said. "Many layer flock owners were feeding fish meal in their feeds as a substitute for selenium since the FDA does not allow selenium to be used in layers," Shutze said. The Southeast is a selenium deficient area.

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