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Belgium-Luxembourg

Dairy Livestock and Poultry

DIOXIN SCANDAL CONTINUES TO SPREAD

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Report Highlights:

Belgium takes butter off the market. Fear now of an export ban for all Belgian products of animal origin.

Dioxin Scandal Continues to Spread

Belgium takes butter off the market

On June 6, the Belgian Government decided that butter would be added to the products withheld from the market. Due to the high fat content in butter, the chance that it is contaminated with dioxin is relatively high. The consumption of fatty meats such as salami and pate has also been forbidden.

The Belgian Government has reportedly given the European Union a list with the names of 1000 Belgian poultry, hog and bovine breeding farms which are suspected to have fed dioxin contaminated feed to their animals.

The Belgian Prime Minister, Jean Luc Dehaene, said on June 6 that he cannot guarantee when foods of animal origin will be safe again for human consumption. On June 8, it was reported that there is no evidence available yet whether it concerned a one time contamination with dioxin or whether it has been going on for a long time.

On June 7, the economic losses from the dioxin scandal have reportedly been estimated to be \$500 million. Dutch newspapers report that Belgium does not want to remove all dairy products from the market, as suggested by the EU. An export ban of all Belgian products of animal origin is now feared.

Investigations continue concerning origin of industrial oils

On June 6, the Belgian Government assumed that the fat rendering company Verkest in Deinze was the only source of contamination. Leaking heating coils immersed in the fat had been considered to be the main cause of the contamination, but no PCB's were detected in the oil from the coils. As reported previously, PCB's were also found in the contaminated feed. This means that the investigations continue and that the suppliers of the fats, including some Dutch companies, will be thoroughly questioned.

Faber under heavy pressure

On June 7, 1999, the Dutch Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries, Geke Faber, was heavily criticized by the Dutch Parliament, her own staffers at the Ministry, and Farmer Organizations because she did not react immediately to the dioxin contamination feed scandal. On June 8, newspapers report that there is a likelihood that she might resign. Yesterday the Dutch Minister of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries, Mr. Hayo Apotheker resigned June 7. He stated that it was due to lack of political support by the Dutch Government for his restructuring plan of the Dutch hog sector. (See report NL9035 dated 6/7/99)

Belgian compound feed used on Dutch farms free of dioxin

On June 6, it was reported that compound feed produced in Belgium but used by farms in the Netherlands was not contaminated. Feed samples, probably taken on the date which permits adequate laboratory analysis, were analyzed by the Dutch Institute for Food Quality Control (RIKILT). The findings were supposedly sent on June 6 to the Dutch parliament. The result of the RIKILT analysis was that no dioxin levels were found higher than those permitted. Samples were taken from 500 hog farms to which the contaminated feed was reportedly delivered. Of these 500 hog farms, deliveries from about 350 were blocked before the results were published. A June 7 press release of the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries and the Dutch Ministry of Health stated that some of the blocked farms were allowed again to market their produce. All the pig farms which received feed from Belgium have now been allowed to continue production, as none of the analyzed samples contained higher levels of dioxin.

All Dutch poultry farms- except two- were allowed to resume marketing their produce. From the two excluded companies, the results are not yet available. According to various sources, two methods exist to determine dioxin levels in food products. One of these methods will require about two to three weeks to produce results while another method takes only 2-4 days.