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A CAUTIONARY TALE

Regulations require overseas suppliers of animal feed to New Zealand to give a comprehensive account of the ingredients and to indicate processing procedures. But is spot-testing for dioxin called for, either in the country of origin, or in this country as the product enters asks the National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ). The answer, it appears, is there is no such requirement.

“Dioxin can cause cancer,” says Dell Panny, NCWNZ’s Environmental Officer. “It builds up in the body and remains there for years; accumulating.”

In Germany, discovery of high levels of dioxin in poultry, eggs and pork has led to the slaughter of thousands of hens and pigs, and the destruction of hundreds of thousands of eggs. The source? Animal feed. The impact on affected farmers and on the economy has yet to be calculated. Import of Germany’s pork and eggs has been banned in China and Korea. In London, eggs from Germany have been torn from supermarket shelves.

The dioxin was located in a fatty by-product of the biofuel industry that was added to animal feed. The company [Harles and Jenzsch] suggested by-products from palm, soy and rapeseed were safe for use in livestock feed. Germany is still looking for the cause, such as the use of a chemical catalyst in biofuel production, or soil contamination from herbicides and pesticides.

Government agencies were relying on self-monitoring within companies, rather than employing their own staff to conduct independent inspection. Furthermore, testing for dioxin is expensive. Several days are required for the results of each test to be known.

Germany’s response has been to examine the entire animal feed industry and to implement a fresh set of rules, including the necessity for animal feed producers to test ingredients and then to submit all results to the authorities.

“In New Zealand, we often fail to learn from overseas errors and examples,” says Dell Panny. “We could have avoided the leaky buildings crisis, if we’d paid heed to the experience of the Canadians who had already been there and done that! We cannot afford to ignore the dioxin warning from Germany.”

Further Information:

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