



EUROPE

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German dioxin scandal: More contamination than feared

Up to 3,000 tonnes of an animal feed additive sold in Germany have been found to contain traces of dioxin, according to a government report.

Earlier, officials said they believed that just 527 tonnes of the additive - which is a type of fat - had been contaminated.

After dioxin was found in eggs and poultry last week, more than 1,000 farms were banned from selling eggs.

Officials said the level of dioxin did not pose a real risk to humans.

Some 136,000 potentially contaminated eggs were exported to the Netherlands, it has emerged.

Dioxin is a poisonous chemical, linked to the development of cancer in humans.

Holger Eichele, a spokesman for Germany's agriculture ministry, said the European Commission had been informed and it was not aware of exports to any other EU states.

There were no indications that the suspect ingredient or any potentially tainted feed had been exported, he added.

A spokesperson for EU Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy John Dalli said it was "too early" to consider a ban on exports.

Farm search

Police carried out searches on Wednesday at the Schleswig-Holstein farm which produced the fat, Harles and Jentzsch, and a subsidiary in Lower Saxony.

Harles and Jentzsch sold the fat to 25 German feed manufacturers.

It has said the dioxin possibly came from a Dutch supplier.

Consumer Protection Minister Ilse Aigner urged states affected by the tainted food scandal to clarify whether eggs contaminated with dioxin had been sold to consumers.

To date, North Rhine-Westphalia has been the only state to name two chicken farms that delivered products out to regional grocery stores, German radio says.

Most of the affected farms are said to be located in Lower Saxony.

As a result of the scandal, more than 8,000 chickens have been culled.

Germans have been urged to keep an eye out for eggs that may have been tainted.

Officials say the warning to consumers applies only to eggs sold before 23 December.

Demand for stricter penalties

Under current German law, offenders who use harmful or banned substances in food and animal feed can be fined or face up to three years in prison.

Regional agricultural ministers plan to meet later this month to discuss the consequences of the dioxin scandal.

"There is an urgent need for much stricter penalties against those who break the law

when it comes to food and animal feed regulations," said Juergen Reinholz, agriculture minister for Thuringia.

Such "charlatans" can only be swayed by strict, deterrent sanctions, he said.

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