



USAHA News Release

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For immediate release:

MELAMINE FEED CONTAMINATION IS FOCUS OF TWO USAHA COMMITTEES

Reno, Nev., Oct. 23, 2007 – “Melamine Contamination of Animal Feed - Lessons Learned and Future Impact” was the focus of a joint meeting of the USAHA Committee on Feed Safety and the USAHA Committee on Food Safety here this week.

The two committee chairs noted the intricate relationship between feed and food safety during the melamine contamination incident in the spring of 2007 that caused a pet food recall. This interrelationship prompted the decision to conduct a joint committee session at this year’s USAHA meeting.

In mid-March 2007, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) received reports from a pet food firm that animals fed the firm’s pet food in a palatability study had died. This prompted a recall of the pet food. FDA subsequently received some 18,000 consumer complaints in two and one-half months from pet owners claiming that animals had died or became seriously ill from consuming various pet foods. This compares with about 6,000 complaints per year the agency ordinarily receives for all of its regulated products.

It was determined that the toxic substance in pet foods was not melamine alone, but rather a combination of melamine and cyanuric acid. This combination causes the formation of crystals in the urine, which leads to kidney damage and, in some cases, death. The FDA determined that pet food ingredients imported from two firms in China as wheat gluten and rice protein concentrate were, in fact, both predominately wheat flour to which melamine had been added. It was theorized that this was done to boost the protein levels in the imported ingredients. Melamine breaks down to several metabolites including cyanuric acid, ammeline and ammelide.

Subsequently, several pet food manufacturers reported distributing melamine-contaminated pet food scraps to poultry and swine producers for incorporation into feed for these animals. This was found to be a common practice for pet food that was not deemed suitable for the retail market, but could provide favorable nutritional attributes for animal feed.

Both swine and poultry fed the contaminated feed were placed under quarantine. But testing determined that there was a very low risk to human health in such cases involving pork and poultry. As a result, the quarantines were eventually lifted.

A representative of the Pet Food Institute noted that the recall of some 60 million cans and pouches of wet food amounted to about one day’s consumption of pet food throughout the United States. It was also pointed out how a contamination incident of this nature could have

gotten directly into the human food chain. Wheat gluten provides protein and assists in holding the shape of many products, not just pet food.

About 600 million pounds of wheat gluten is used in the United States annually, but the United States only produces 20 percent of the total used. The pet food industry uses about 25 percent of the total. So it was essentially the luck of the draw that this time the contaminated gluten went into pet food.

Members of the two committees also heard a report on the Food and Drug Amendments Act of 2007, which contains multiple references to both human and pet food safety. One section specifically addresses the communication requirements to be followed during recalls of pet and human foods. Many of the presentations on the pet food recall detailed breakdowns in communication as one of the main problems in dealing with situations of this kind.

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