

Transcript of FDA Press Conference on the Pet Food Recall

FTS-HHS FDA

Moderator: Julie Zawisza

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Coordinator: Hello and thank you for standing by. All lines will be in listen only until the question and answer portion.

Please press star-1 on your phone to ask your question.

Today's call is being recorded. If you have any objections, you may disconnect at this time.

And I would like to introduce your host, Julie Zawisza.

Ma'am, please begin.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you.

We'd like to welcome everyone to this briefing this afternoon. I'm Julie Zawisza, the Assistant Commissioner for Public Affairs.

I have with me several FDA officials and we have an official from the US Department of Agriculture on the line.

Format for the call this afternoon is as follows: you will hear from the FDA and from the USDA and then we'll take your questions.

Our first speaker today is Dr. David Acheson, the Chief Medical Officer with FDA's Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition. Well actually that's what he was until this morning.

Right, David?

David Acheson: Right.

Julie Zawisza: My apologies.

He's now the assistant commissioner for Food Protection with the Food and Drug Administration.

(Unintelligible) congratulations (to you).

David Acheson: Thank you.

And we'll be hearing from Dr. Kenneth Petersen, the Assistant Administrator for field operations with the Food Safety and Inspection Service with the US Department of Agriculture.

And we'll be hearing from Walter Batts in FDA's Office of International Programs.

With that I'd like to turn this over to Dr. Acheson.

David Acheson: Thank you, Julie. This is David Acheson.

What I want to do is to just briefly go over some of the points that were in the two recent press releases that we put out. The first being on Saturday that's related to hog and the more recent one yesterday that was related to poultry.

First of all, to deal with the hog issue. I want to emphasize that we still have no evidence of harm to humans associated with any of the processed products from the swine that were fed the contaminated feeds.

And we believe that the likelihood of illness from such exposure is extremely low. We also have no evidence of reports of harm to the swine themselves.

One of the reasons we believe that this (effect) is very low on humans is due to the dilution effect insomuch that the hog feed is only made up of - to a small degree (off) of the contaminated pet food.

Further the melamine is excreted in the - from a hog in urine. It is not known to bioaccumulate in the animals.

And then finally, even if it were in the muscle tissue to some low extent, pork is not consumed to a high degree in the human diet; unlike pets which may be eating food exclusively. The pet same type of food exclusively.

To further evaluate all of this in terms of the harm to humans and furthering our information about the levels, FDA and USDA are working collaboratively to develop a series of new assays focused on being able to measure melamine and melamine-related compounds in muscle tissues such as that from hog and from poultry. That will give us a better sense as to what the levels actually are.

However, based on our current knowledge of the amount in the feed to begin with, we do know these levels are going to be small.

That data will also help us better understand risk assessments and just basically further our understanding of the whole situation.

Secondly, to move on to the other press release, we did release another press release jointly yesterday with USDA that was related to poultry. And it was essentially in this situation, contaminated wheat gluten that was used as a portion of chicken feed on some farms in Indiana.

I should point out that it was rice protein concentrate that was (the trouble along) on the swine; but the poultry, it was the contaminated wheat gluten.

Same situation that we had seen with the pet food. These are just - it's the same pet food, a portion of which was used to make the hog food.

As I said to recap, some of the contaminated wheat gluten was used as a small portion of the poultry feed. We estimate based on discussions with the farms and the feed mills, it was approximately 5%.

At this time, investigators have found a number of broiler farms and breeder farms in that state, in Indiana that we know have received the contaminated food in early February and that it was fed to the poultry.

All of the food that was fed to broilers is believed to have been consumed. It's essentially been processed. It's out the door.

And the breeders who are still there are currently under voluntary hold by the owners.

We believe the situation in the poultry is very much like that for the swine. We do not believe that there is any significant threat of human illness for this from consuming poultry that may have been given very low levels of the contaminated pet food; exactly the same reasons with the swine.

It's only a small portion of what the poultry was fed. And human consumers will only eat poultry as a small part of their overall diet.

Like the swine, we have absolutely no evidence that the poultry came to any harm. So overall, the two situations are very similar.

And we are continuing to follow up on investigations on both of those as we move forward.

And at this stage, as I've - as we've said before on these calls, this is an ongoing investigation. And new data will almost certainly come to light as we continue to work through the various avenues that we're currently operating under with - jointly with the USDA and our state and local colleagues.

With that, I'd like to hand back to Julie.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you, Dr. Acheson.

Now, we'd like to ask Dr. Kenneth Petersen with the USDA to provide the updates on the USDA.

Kenneth Petersen: Okay thank you and good afternoon everybody.

Well as you just heard, Dr. Acheson walk through a couple of the factors regarding consumption for swine and poultry and because of those factors --

with the low percentage in their diet and low consumption on average of American consumers for pork and poultry; meaning that is not a major part of their diet; therefore we're not initiating any recall of these meat products associated with the animals at this time.

We do continue to work jointly with FDA at all levels regarding the investigation in both the rice gluten and now the wheat gluten.

And our sense is that the investigation will lead to additional farms where contaminated feed may have been fed to either animals or poultry. But that will come as the data and the investigation continues.

Currently, there are six states involved with the swine part of the investigation; that's California, Kansas, New York, North Carolina, South Carolina and Utah.

And then as you heard, Indiana is the primary state of interest regarding poultry that were fed the contaminated feed.

And I think we'll stop there and turn it back to the moderator.

Coordinator: Thank you.

At this time, if you would like to ask a question, please (press star-1) on your phone. You will be announced prior to asking (your) question. And to withdraw your question, press...

Julie Zawisza: Also, ladies and gentlemen, please state your name and affiliation.

And let's go with one question so that we can get to as many as possible this afternoon.

((Crosstalk))

Walter Batts: Excuse me, this is - do you want to do the international piece now or wait?

Julie Zawisza: Sure, we can do that. That was Walter Batts with the Office of International Programs.

Go ahead, Walter.

Walter Batts: I just like to report that we currently have two FDA (staffs or) officials on the ground, a senior international policy specialist for China and one of our field investigators. They will be joined by a third investigator tomorrow.

On this past Monday, April 30, our senior policy analyst did have a meeting with the officials of the Chinese government General Administration for Quality Supervision Inspection and Quarantine, known as AQSIQ.

During that meeting, we were briefed on the investigation that the Chinese government had done to date. We also secured agreement to have full cooperation from the Chinese government as we investigate this matter.

As you know, there's a big holiday going on this week in China and there are a number of officials, (I think, believe), all of the officials are on holiday, but they have committed to have at least one official who work at this need to, again, review what they have learned so far and to plan future cooperative efforts that will take place over the next few days including - and over the next week including visits to appropriate sites.

With that, conclude my (statement on) international front.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you, Walter.

Operator, we now like to open up the line and take some calls.

Coordinator: Thank you.

(Marian Falco) with CNN, you may ask your question.

(Marian Falco): Hi. Do you know how many people may have consumed chicken products?
Are you saying that pork and chicken is not a big part of the American diet?
But I bet there are plenty of folks out there who would disagree with that.

And also, can you clarify what the Chinese say they do or don't do with melamine because there have been conflicting reports. They say they don't put it in pet products. It appears that obviously they do. So what do you have to clarify on that end?

Julie Zawisza: Dr. Acheson.

David Acheson: Well let me first try to correct by what I meant by they don't form a large part of the diet. I did not mean to imply for that (due another) large number of American consumers (unintelligible) with pork and poultry. That is not what I meant.

The contrast to draw here is with the pet, it frequently will consume the same sort of food 100%. So if you have a contaminated product and it's 100% of the pet food, that's a very different scenario from a human consumer in which

chicken or pork is just essentially the meat on the side of the plate with the two vegs. That's what I was implying is that poultry typically is not an exclusive nutrient in the human diet.

And I'll pass the rest of it, I think, over to Dr. Petersen.

Kenneth Petersen: What was - (unintelligible), could you repeat the second...?

(Marian Falco): Well the question I had was, how many people may have eaten some of these chicken products? Your press release yesterday was very way vague. It was processed but how much? How many people may have consumed this?

You told us about 350 hogs in California and Kansas and Utah, but how many chickens are we talking about? How many people might be out there?

Kenneth Petersen: Okay. Well we, of course, have to remember, we haven't found any evidence to indicate consumption of this is unsafe.

Yesterday, when we identified the farms of interest, so now we're at - we're looking at the farms and then what was determined was the poultry were fed this feed several months ago.

And so given the short lifespan of chickens when they grow out, those have already gone into the food chain. And so we would need to look at what individual plans they may have gone, too?

But given those other consumption factors that Dr. Acheson indicated, that's not a feature of our investigation today. It's trying to find how many people, you know, consumed chicken from these individual farms.

As you indicated, chicken, of course, is an important part of the American diet. It's not necessarily something that people are going to eat everyday and on an ongoing basis.

So because we don't see any health issue because of the consumption factors, how many people could have eaten infected chicken or not infected, but the chicken that consumed the contaminated feed or even pork that was consumed. It's not the feature of our investigations today.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you.

Next question.

Coordinator: (Greg Pastio) with MarketWatch.

(Greg Pastio): Hi. Thanks for taking the call and having it today.

To that same end, I'm wondering not - how many people may have eaten the chicken, but how many chickens are being held by the breeder farms and how many of the broiler chickens are expected to have been sent out and processed?

Man: (Three hundred thousand)...

Julie Zawisza: Dr. Petersen.

Kenneth Petersen: On the breeder end, currently the estimated numbers we're working off of is around 100,000 breeders that are waiting to be the (pot list).

(Greg Pastio): How much does - how many - can you give me kind of an idea of what that is of the total market for the year or anything like that?

Kenneth Petersen: Well for breeders of what we call heavy fowl, (let me) just off the cuff, probably total heavy fowl slaughter I would say would be several millions.

(Greg Pastio): Okay.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you.

(Greg Pastio): And as far as the broilers?

Kenneth Petersen: I'm sorry, say again.

(Greg Pastio): How many of the broilers are expected to have been, you know, to have eaten the feed and gone out in the process?

Kenneth Petersen: That's the working number is several million in the range of 2 million, 2.5 million to 3 million.

(Greg Pastio): Three million?

Man: (Yeah).

(Greg Pastio): Three million broiler chickens?

Kenneth Petersen: Two point five to 3, again, out of a national broiler slaughter number is over 9 billion - 90 billion.

(Greg Pastio): Oh wow, okay out of 90 billion?

((Crosstalk))

Kenneth Petersen: And I've added zero, they're 9 billion. So...

(Greg Pastio): So you're saying...

((Crosstalk))

Kenneth Petersen: ...out of 9 billion would be the top end.

(Greg Pastio): Three million out of 9 billion.

Kenneth Petersen: Correct.

(Greg Pastio): Okay.

Kenneth Petersen: Yeah, approximately 9, 9.2 young chickens slaughtered in this country every year.

(Greg Pastio): Okay thank you.

Julie Zawisza: Thanks. Next question.

Coordinator: Abigail Goldman with the Los Angeles Times.

Abigail Goldman: Good afternoon.

Dr. Acheson, I wanted to know your new position. What does that allow you to do or the agency to do that you were not able to do before? And how

exactly - can you be a little more specific on how this can help into the safety of the human or pet food (unintelligible)?

David Acheson: Hello, this is David Acheson.

I don't want to devote a huge chunk of this call talking about my new position. The purpose of this call is talk about the melamine situation.

But a brief response is to essentially tell you that this position was set up by the commissioner of FDA with a view to developing a strategic trans-agency approach to all food safety and food defense issues, hence, type of food protection which encompasses both.

Within that it encompasses food and feed at all levels, involving the centers and the field as well as the research components of the agency.

So the goal is, as I've said, is to develop a strategic way of thinking, move into the future, acknowledging that it's been changed in recent years with regard to food safety and food defense on both the domestic and import fronts and develop a strategic vision to tackle that.

And the second component of the position is to coordinate situations such as this, where we've got significant health hazards related to food and feed that cross multiple sectors of the agency. But I'd be happy to follow up further with you directly on this, but I don't want to sidetrack this call, which has a different purpose.

Abigail Goldman: Thank you.

Julie Zawisza: Next question, please.

Coordinator: (Rick) (unintelligible) with Washington Post.

(Rick White): Hi. Thank you. (Rick White) from the Post.

Julie, I hope you'll give us the spelling of the name of Batts (with International). But my question is, is your investigation going along the lines that there may be chicken still alive, broilers still alive that may have been fed this feed within the last few months?

And if so, what can you tell us about how many of maybe in play here. And I want to be clear if there are some still alive even though you don't think there's any health risk from eating them, are you not required by law to order them held or to make sure that they are depopulated since they must be deemed adulterated since they adulterated food?

Kenneth Petersen: Okay, it's Dr. Petersen.

Well the chicken - broiler numbers that are what I suggested, so approximately 2-1/2 million to 3 million. And indications are, they were fed back in February and so typical lifespan of a young chicken these days is about 42, 43 days before they come to market.

So that would - they would have been slaughtered sometime, of course, thereafter and are already gone through distribution channels. So likely they were slaughtered sometime in March.

(Rick White): But this food was still circulating in March, so how do you know there weren't any chickens fed and stuffed in March and are still alive?

Kenneth Petersen: Okay, that's part of the investigation that the court has been ongoing as FDA went to the individual pet food manufacturers, then we determined where, if any place, the scraps have been and this is the, to date, the chicken feed mill is the only that's been identified and then that went to multiple farms.

Then on the - you talk about holding animals, same principles we discussed the other day for swine whereas if there were swine on farms and same with the poultry that were known to have been said the contaminated feed, then we would not be in a position to apply the mark of inspection to those animals. Therefore, the same depopulation discussion we had with Section 32 funds would be applicable to the poultry.

And so at this point, the poultry that are still alive that we have reason to believe consumed the feeds are approximately 100,000 heavy fowls.

(Rick White): Thank you.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you.

And, (Rick), Walter Batts' last name is spelled B-A-T-T-S.

(Rick White): Thank you.

Julie Zawisza: Next question, please.

Coordinator: Elizabeth Weise with USA Today.

Elizabeth Weise: Hi. Thanks for taking my call.

I had a question about the import restriction that was put into place on Friday. What was the motivation for broadening that beyond the two original (companies)?

Julie Zawisza: We're going to ask Michael Rogers, who is the Director of our division of field investigations to take that question.

Michael?

Michael Rogers: Thank you.

I think the analytical results that we have associated with the two sources of origin in China, as well as what we're seeing as far as our trace-forward investigation warrant the agency taking - initiating an import alert, a countrywide import alert to include the detention without physical examination, which is countrywide for the following vegetable protein products in China: wheat gluten, rice gluten, rice protein, rice protein concentrate, corn gluten, corn gluten meal, corn byproducts, soy protein, soy gluten and other proteins, including (mung beans).

And that is presently in effect.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you.

Next question.

Coordinator: (Christopher Jowen) with Reuters.

(Christopher Jowen): (And so I wonder) if you guys can just update on the last Friday or last Thursday rather. You've mentioned that a poultry feed mill in Missouri

(unintelligible) purchased that contaminated feed. I wanted to know if that facility is still part of the investigation and what you folks have found so far.

William Smith: This is Bill Smith of the Office of Enforcement and Evaluation.

(That) we are still doing fact-finding and we have not arrived at a final conclusion on that, but we're still investigating and looking at that.

(Christopher Jowen): How long do you anticipate that portion of the investigation taking (since it was) last Thursday that was first brought out there, the potential target?

William Smith: We are working closely with FDA on that. I don't want to, you know, guess at a time frame. As soon as we know something, we will make everybody - make that known to everybody.

(Christopher Jowen): Are there any other states or facilities within other states that you're currently looking at in addition to Indiana, Missouri?

William Smith: As the invest - we're - as Dr. Petersen said, this is an ongoing investigation, so if information comes available to us, of course, we're going to follow back and collect that information and do records and that kind of thing.

David Acheson: This is David Acheson from FDA.

Just to add something to that and thanks, Bill.

The - one of the things we're trying to be careful about is not go out with information that we haven't confirmed, especially with regard to the state. It's important that - this is a very broad, ongoing complex, multi-pronged

investigation and we don't want to go out with information until we're sure that it's accurate.

Much of this is still ongoing. As I've said before, because of its very nature and the nature of this investigation, there is a distinct possibility that it will broaden. I'm not saying that it will, but we need to be prepared for that to happen, but we don't want at this stage to go out with speculations.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you.

Next question.

Next question, please.

Coordinator: (Martina Reddy) with ABC News.

(Martina Reddy): Yes. Hi. Thanks for taking my question.

I was wondering with regard to the import restriction placed on wheat gluten, rice gluten, et cetera, are there any food products on grocery shelves today that consumers should be concerned about that may be tainted?

David Acheson: This is David Acheson of FDA.

No is the answer to that.

One of the questions that we had very early on is whether any of this contaminated rice protein concentrate or wheat gluten may have been used as an ingredient in human food directly. All our investigations to date have shown that is not the case.

That gives me an opportunity to say briefly - you've heard about the preventative strategy that we're doing at port, but there is a parallel preventative strategy that we're doing domestically, which I discussed last week, which is a surveillance assignment in which our investigators are going out to a number of domestic manufacturers who used protein concentrate, educating them about the importance of having good knowledge about their suppliers, and obtaining samples of various protein concentrate and testing them for the presence of melamine.

And again, that's another part of the investigation. It's just getting underway and it's unpredictable where that will go. It may yield positive. It may not.

But to answer your original question, I want to emphasize right now there is no indication that any of these contaminated products ended up directly in human food.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you.

Next question.

Coordinator: (Maury Adder) with the Wall Street Journal.

(Maury Adder): Thank you very much.

Can you give any more specific examples of what the USDA and the FDA plan on doing differently in the future to prevent contamination incidents?

Also, have you pegged the number to how much the government is expecting to spend on depopulating animals and indemnifying farmers?

David Acheson: I'd ask Dr. Petersen to take the second part of that. This is David Acheson. Let me try to, at least, speak to FDA side of the first part.

Right now, we're focused on this active investigation. I think we're already learning lessons from this. And for example, we generally based our resources where the high risks are. That's our strategy. It typically works. I think we've had two examples recently. One wheat gluten and not too long ago, peanut butter, where we had food safety issues linked to products and ingredients that we did not typically consider high risk.

So we're in the process of reexamining that whole scenario and that speaks to both import and domestic in terms of rethinking the strategic approach as to how to address this.

(Maury Adder): Can you elaborate on how you're rethinking that strategic approach?

David Acheson: That's part of the (unintelligible) of my new position, and I've been in it about four hours. I'm not quite there yet.

(Maury Adder): Okay good luck.

Julie Zawisza: Dr. Petersen, would you like to take the second question?

Kenneth Petersen: Sure. On the financial aspects of the depopulation, that's Section 32 funds, which of course as we suggested are designed to restore the purchasing power of the farmers, the affected growers.

And I don't have it. I wish I did today. I don't have a dollar value for you. The number of the head of swine hasn't really changed that we suggested the other day, roughly 6000 or so and then the poultry number that I mentioned today.

First, we'd need to determine the, of course, fair market value of those animals prior to what - where the market was prior to this notification went out. That's kind of how it's done, and any associated cost with the depopulation. So, until we know kind of the raw numbers and then put a dollar value on the individual market value of those animals, I won't be in a position to give you a dollar figure.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you.

Next question.

Coordinator: Daniel Goldstein with Bloomberg News.

Daniel Goldstein: Yes, hi. Just a question on the 38 or so farms in Indiana.

Can you tell us who owns those farms? Those are commercial farms, they're contract growers, and who actually they were supplying poultry to?

Man: Commercial.

Julie Zawisza: Give us one second, please.

David Acheson: This is David Acheson.

This time, we're not able to do that because it's part of an ongoing active investigation.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you.

We'll take the next question.

Coordinator: Lester Aldrich with Dow Jones News Wireless.

Lester Aldrich: Yes. Do you have any sense of how long this has been going on in China? This whole thing seems to be well-known over there like it's common knowledge. Have we been importing these kinds of products for a long period of time?

David Acheson: This is David Acheson of FDA.

The truthful answer to your question is that we don't know. Clearly, that is a concern as to whether this has been going on for some period of time and if it has, how come it's just surfaced.

You could speculate that the reason it just surfaced is for some reason the ratio of the melamine to melamine related compound is different in a couple of batches. That's what triggered the alert here because it made the pet sick and caused a serious examination investigation of the whole system.

So I don't know how long this has been going on, but I too have read reports that this is not something that started recently. But as to the facts, we don't have them.

I'm hopeful that maybe some of our investigations in China will give us better insights into some of that.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you.

Next question.

Coordinator: (Steve Hedges) with Chicago Tribune.

(Steve Hedges): Yes.

I wanted to ask you about the - your decision on the recall. You seemed to be suggesting that it's too late to do a recall because of the life cycle of the poultry.

But why not let consumers decide whether they want to consume that food and name the companies and the farms where the chickens came from. I mean a lot of people freeze chicken, a lot of stores freeze chicken.

Kenneth Petersen: This is Dr. Petersen.

Well, again, I mean it's more than just the shelf life of poultry or swine. As Dr. Acheson suggested, when you look at what's the potential exposure and it - (that) it seems extremely low, again, for the factors that he mentioned.

This - the wheat gluten and the rice gluten were just small components of the pet food, so we start with that as being a small component. Then the way swine and poultry are raised today, these are pretty sophisticated operations, where they have very defined rations and so the pet food byproducts that went into the rations were just a very small component.

He mentioned 5%, so it's a small part of the pet food and it's a small part of the feed and it was - if anything said for a very - indications are, it's spread for a very brief period of time.

And then you look at the frequency of people consuming pork or, you know, chicken. So all of those things together along with no evidence of any harm associated with people from eating processed pork or chicken, we made a decision and we think it's the appropriate decision in concert with FDA that no recall is being issued at this time.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you.

Next question.

Coordinator: (John Walcoff) for the Baltimore Sun.

(John Walcoff): I just had a question about the melamine. Do you have any better idea whether it was indeed the melamine that caused the deaths of the cats and dogs and how it may have acted?

David Acheson: This is David Acheson of FDA.

There's a real absence of toxicity data on melamine other than some somewhat old studies in rats. They do indicate that very, very high levels of all ingestion of melamine can lead to significant illness in the rats in the form of bladder stones and ultimately cancer.

That's way higher than any of the levels that we've seen ingested by the animals. So it begs the question then what was going on. And I think as this is unfolded and the toxicity assays have been looked at, what would seem here is

that it's probably some sort of combination effect of melamine plus some of the melamine-related compound that is actually what's causing the toxicity.

That's my view of it and I certainly would invite Dr. Sundlof, if you've got further insights into that.

Stephen Sundlof: (Unintelligible) the information that we've seen (unintelligible) implies as a more information (unintelligible) imply that it is an interaction between melamine and some - other related compound (unintelligible) severe, acute renal failure.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you.

That was Dr. Acheson first and then Dr. Stephen Sundlof, Director of the Center for Veterinary Medicine.

Okay. Next question, please.

Coordinator: (Celia Goodnow) with Seattle Post-Intelligencer.

(Celia Goodnow): Hi. I wonder if you could just update the basic statistics on the pet food recall because I've seen different numbers.

How many pet food products have actually been recalled at this point and what percentage of the total market is that? That was supposed to be 1% of all the available pet foods initially, and I'm not sure what that figure is now.

And I also wanted to confirm that the FDA has received unconfirmed reports of 1950 cat deaths and 2200 dog deaths related to contaminated food.

Man: (Unintelligible) (percent of that).

(Celia Goodnow): Is that correct?

Julie Zawisza: We ask Michael Rogers to take that.

Michael Rogers: Yeah. I'll take your second question.

What we'd like to reveal is the agency has received as many as 17,000 calls into the agency regarding this pet food incident that are alleging some association with animal illness or death associated to recalled products.

Of those, about 8000 or so have been entered into our official data system and have been evaluated and roughly 50% of those alleged in animal death is part of a long-term project.

The agency is going to be evaluating the balance of those to determine their direct association to some of these recalled products.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you.

On your first question, you're asking the percentage of pet food affected by the contamination of the...

((Crosstalk))

Julie Zawisza: ...the total pet food on the market?

(Celia Goodnow): Well, also and the bare numbers because it looks like there are couple of different ways of calculating this by - one was, it looks like maybe 150 brands

or formulations, but I've also seen 5300. And I wonder if you can explain the difference in how you're counting those things and what percentage of the overall supply of pet food that constitutes?

Julie Zawisza: We're going to ask Dr. Sundlof (unintelligible) to take that?

Stephen Sundlof: Yeah. I don't have exact figures. The 153 are actually different product labels that had been recalled.

Now, of those product labels, there are a number of different packaging, sizes, production dates, and when you take all of that information into account, it comes to over 5000, something around the order of 5500 different products that were recalled.

But of those, all of those, they represent about 150 brands, different products themselves. Again, they are listed by production dates, so certain production dates were subject to recall, other production dates weren't, and that's where you get all of these large numbers.

Just adding on to what Michael Rogers said, that those reports of deaths are just that there are people that called in and reported, (I guess), that they believe might be related to the pet food. We have not confirmed those yet as to whether or not those truly were related to the pet food and that's something that's going to take some time.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you.

Next question.

Coordinator: Alexei Barrionuevo with the New York Times.

Alexei Barrionuevo: Yeah, hi. I was wondering if you (unintelligible) just how many domestic plants are you actually visiting in your search for melamine or melamine related compounds.

And are you - also, are you asking for any emergency resources to do this investigation, either domestically or in China?

David Acheson: This is David Acheson.

In terms of the first part of your question, there's two pieces to it. One is in - in terms of the follow-up of the current investigation and we're just going to the places that we need to go to based on the information that we get.

The second part to that is with regard to the domestic surveillance assignment, and there, the intention is to get out to as many of the firms as we can who we know based on our records received Chinese wheat protein concentrates - no, (unintelligible) well let me rephrase that. Who received Chinese protein concentrates of vegetable origin. That's essentially the driver for what that is.

And the goal is to get to as many of those as quickly as we can. Obviously, the resources are being devoted to the current immediate crisis, and we're also taking that off into the domestic piece.

Alexei Barrionuevo: How many plants do you think, do you believe received Chinese protein concentration - concentrated vegetable origin exactly?

David Acheson: At this point, I don't have a number on that in terms of the total number of plants. (But it's)...

Alexei Barrionuevo: (It's over a hundred). Is it just dozen? How many are we talking about? I mean just kind of roughly if you don't have an exact number?

David Acheson: It's - (I just say), I don't have an exact number, but it could well be in the hundreds.

The other thing that I wanted to just emphasize is that we're working cooperatively with the states on this. So they're helping us with the assignment and that's proven to be a big help.

With regard to your question about resources, we have been in discussion with HHS around resources of getting more people in to help within our emergency operations center and that's working out well.

((Crosstalk))

Julie Zawisza: Thank you.

Next question.

Coordinator: Steve Dale with Tribune Media Services.

Steve Dale: Thank you.

It seems that if the melamine could put down a cat or 160-pound Great Dane, theoretically, or the melamine combined with other substances, (unintelligible) you'd have to explain to me how is it then that - say a little baby eating chicken baby food for a week, maybe even with other baby food could not at all be affected? I mean, it can't be good, I don't think.

Also, I have - one more question about Senator Durbin and Representative DeLauro's introduction of their package, which they are calling the Safe Food Act, I believe. I'm curious as to how the FDA feels about that.

Julie Zawisza: We - as a matter policy, (we wouldn't) comment on proposed legislation, but Dr. Acheson can take your (unintelligible) question.

David Acheson: Yeah. (I mean) I understand your concern, you know, with regard to small infants consuming poultry that may have been (pet) contaminated feeds. But I want to emphasize that the dilution factors here are (enormous).

We have a raw ingredient, which is made up of - say, we picked the wheat gluten. Wheat gluten only has some percentage of it that's called the melamine related compound and a few percent. That is due to manufacture of pet food. Only a small amount of that pet food is used to manufacture the feed that's said to (unintelligible) the hogs or the chicken.

The compounds in there, the melamine and melamine related compounds, at least in the hogs, (and other) melamine is excreted in the urine. We're certainly not aware if there's any bioaccumulation.

So we're already going into these animals with very, very low levels. When you combine that with the fact that the amount of chicken or pork that would be consumed, even by a baby on a body weight basis would be pretty small. Babies typically do not live exclusively off just chicken or just pork. It's a mixed diet to be nutritionally complete.

When you multiply all of those factors in, we believe the likelihood of illness to humans, including infants, is extremely small that there really is no likelihood of a problem.

And it really is - it's a (dilutional) agreement. It's not the same as feeding it to a cattle or a dog. We know that's a problem, but that's, as I've said, they - its exclusive diet. It's a much higher level going into the animal than you'd ever see after it's been diluted multiple times and then gone through another animal before it's ever reached the human mouth.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you.

Next question.

Coordinator: (Joan Hauss) with Salt Lake Tribune.

(Joan Hauss): Yes. I've - I read conflicting reports on the swine. How many swine do you think or do you estimate have gone into the human food supply?

And my second question and related to that is, are you continuing your own investigation of the Utah plant, manufacturing plant?

Julie Zawisza: Would USDA like to take that question - those two questions?

Man: (Okay), just one minute.

Okay. While the swine number is the number - where as I suggested earlier and was in the press release last Thursday, we're still working with the total exposure number for swine from the farms that, you know, we've confirmed that received the contaminated feeds and those swine who ate the contaminated feeds. The total numbers are still around 6000.

And then of that, we're determining well, which or how many went to market, but we know who's on the farm today and that's the preponderance of the 6000. And the...

((Crosstalk))

(Joan Hauss): So how many have gone to market?

Man: Yeah, that's what, - as we go to the farms, we'll have to look at well what are the age of the swine and then how many have been distributed. But early indications are, you know, well over 5500, 5600 of them are still resident on the farm.

Then the Utah Plant, yes, we're still involved with that establishment.

((Crosstalk))

(Joan Hauss): Do you know where that feed is going from that plant or where that feed has - where they've shipped that feed, that plant?

Man: Well the feeds from the Utah plant?

(Joan Hauss): Yes.

Man: (Okay).

Yeah, they went to - as I understand it, that there are upwards of four farms of interest feed, (you know), related farms and swine farms of interest in Utah that we're specifically looking at.

And then - but back to the 6000, we have to keep and get back to what Dr. Acheson said, even if there's a small number, we look at that number of swine that were slaughtered and then perhaps made their way into the marketplace. If it's a small number, then you have these additional factors that as he indicated, there's no evidence of any kind that suggests there's a concern.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you.

And the FDA will continue to work with the USDA and provide data on the number of farms that have confirmed cases of hogs and poultry that we have determined have consumed the contaminated feed. As soon as we can do that, we will commit to doing that.

Next question, please.

Coordinator: Debbye Turner with CBS News.

Debbye Turner: Yes, hello. Thank you very much for taking the call.

I understand from the report from Mr. Batts from the International front that there's a holiday going on right now in China, but has there been any meetings and is there any preliminary indication as to how the government will cooperate with our investigation and are they still maintaining the position that there is no melamine put in their ingredients that they shipped to the US?

Julie Zawisza: Walter, are you on the line?

Walter Batts: Yes, I am. Can you hear me?

Woman: Yes.

Walter Batts: Yes, this is Walter Batts.

As I reported earlier, our senior international policy specialist who was on the ground on Monday, met with a number of officials from AQSIQ concerning the investigations that they have done to date. We are interested in looking at - during our visits there, on how we can work cooperatively to, you know, get at the bottom of this contamination.

There is a big holiday going on. I guess it would be like officials coming here on the 4th of July and they want to meet with everybody. But be that as it may, they haven't made officials available (to date). We have a meeting planned on Thursday to discuss matters further and to plan for whatever visits we believe are appropriate so that our investigators can take a further look and try to get at the bottom of this.

Debbye Turner: Just curious, what holiday is it?

Walter Batts: I think it's called May Day and it's typically a full-week beginning on Monday. The government facilities actually closed down. Many of the folks go on extended holiday for the week.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you.

We have time for just a few more questions, so let's take the next one.

Coordinator: Karen Roebuck with Pittsburgh Tribune Review.

Karen Roebuck: Hi. Regarding the April 27 import alert, it said that about 750 samples of wheat gluten and products were tested and 330 were positive for melamine related compounds.

Are those all pet food samples and have any human food samples in the surveillance, to date, I mean even a single one tested positive?

And also, it seems contradictory to say that you have to put down the pigs because they're not safe enough to be slaughtered now and go in to the market but yet, it's safe enough not to recall the ones that have already been slaughtered.

Julie Zawisza: Let's start with Michael Rogers and then maybe we could go to Dr. Petersen.

Michael Rogers: I'll comment on the first part of the question. I'm not going to get into the specific numbers.

Certainly when this import alert was published, those potentially represented the numbers at the time but this was an ongoing investigation. We continue to analyze samples and receive additional data that would alter the positives and negatives.

Having said that, the import alert, which is detention without physical exam, is proactive opportunity by the agency to take a look at these vegetable protein products. But it's certainly important to reference that all of the positive samples for rice protein concentrate and wheat gluten has been associated to two primarily sources in China.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you.

Karen Roebuck: But were they all pet food or (where) any of them in human food?

Michael Rogers: There's no evidence to suggest that any of the bulk products went to human food manufacturers.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you.

Dr. Petersen, would you like to take the second part of that question?

Kenneth Petersen: Yes, thank you.

On (unintelligible) Thursday's call, we mentioned - when we look at the feed and FDA made a determination that the feed where they knew had been mixed with the contaminated pet food was the feed that was found to be adulterated. And so that's a, in this case, a legal term. It wasn't specifically related to - well it was a legal term.

Then our burden when those animals, pigs in this case, come to slaughter is can we find them not adulterated and when we know they've eaten feed that FDA found adulterated, we're not able to put the mark of inspection on those animals.

So it is a, in this case, it's appropriate decision. It's a legal interpretation for us to be able to (apply) the mark of inspections for animals that come to market.

Then those that are already in commerce, as we've walked through, you know, on this call, that the - there's no health issue involved as best to either agency, particularly FDA can determine.

So it's a legal issue regarding the live animals. We think it's a prudent decision to prevent further possible entry into the commerce, and we're legally obligated to do that because of the decisions made on this feed. And then on anything that may be in commerce given the health issues and the lack of that we discussed, so we don't think that any further action is appropriate.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you.

And ladies and gentlemen, we have time for one more question.

Coordinator: (Emi Geram) with (King TV) News, Seattle.

(Emi Geram): Thanks for taking my question.

It was mentioned earlier that on the detention list was corn gluten. Have you determined that melamine presence in corn gluten of any kind and what barnyard application would corn gluten have, for what animal would that be provided?

David Acheson: Well this is David Acheson, and I'll certainly take the first part.

In the context within the United States, no, we have not found any evidence of contamination in corn gluten. But historically, that has happened a couple of years ago in South Africa, so we know there is (precedent) for that, which is one of the reasons why we're looking more broadly than wheat gluten and rice protein concentrates.

((Crosstalk))

David Acheson: And the second part of your question, could you repeat that?

(Emi Geram): I'm wondering, in a farm application, which barnyard animals or food animals would be fed feed containing corn gluten.

David Acheson: Can I ask Dr. Sundlof to answer that?

Stephen Sundlof: Yes. I mean it's used like any other vegetable protein to add (unintelligible) the protein to animal feeds, so it could be used for any domestic species, including cattle, pigs, chicken, turkeys, as well as pets.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you.

Do any of our speakers have any final comments, thoughts?

Okay.

Ladies and gentlemen, this concludes our briefing this afternoon, and I'd like to thank all of our speakers, Dr. Acheson, Dr. Petersen, Mr. Batts, Mr. Rogers, Mr. Smith and Dr. Sundlof.

I'd like to thank all of you for your participation and for this - the coverage that you're doing on this investigation. It's very important to us that you - that the (work is out). We appreciate all that you're doing.

And if you have follow-up questions, please contact the FDA Press Office or the USDA Press Office, and check our Web site for regular updates. We will have another briefing on Thursday at 4:00 pm, and we'll talk with you then.

Have a pleasant evening.

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