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Federal inquiry 'ongoing' into tainted feed linked turkey deaths



By Jane Byrne
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US federal officials are investigating how contaminated feed ended up causing the deaths of 50,000 turkeys on a Michigan farm in August 2014.

Entire flocks of turkeys on a network of family-owned farms, Sietsema Farms in Michigan, died on the same weekend, before any of the birds went to market.

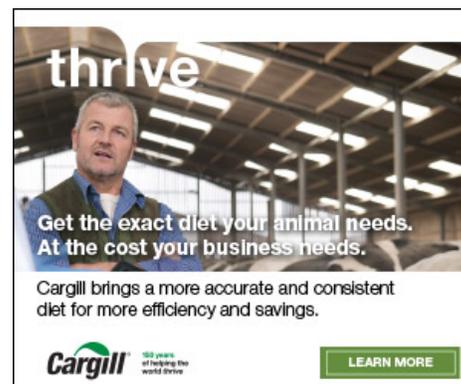
At least 20,000 pigs on the same Michigan farm and more than 100 farms in eight states were said to have received the contaminated feed but there were no pig mortalities as a result, according to officials.

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) are investigating the matter.

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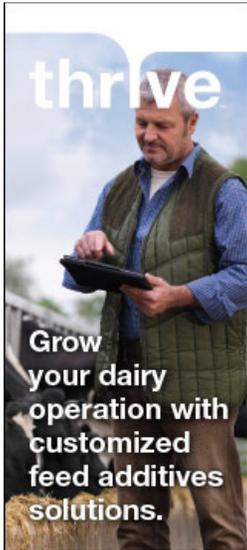
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FDA spokeswoman, Juli Putnam, told us the agency can provide only limited information because the inquiry is ongoing.

"The turkeys at Sietsema Farm that were exposed to feed contaminated with Lascadoil died before they made it to market, and exposed hogs were subjected to the recommended 28-day withdrawal period before going to slaughter," she said.

Putnam said the two agencies worked closely with the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD) on the incident.

James Averill, Michigan state veterinarian and director of the animal industry division of MDARD, briefed that state's commission on agriculture on 21 January on the various actions taken by interested Michigan parties to contain the incident last summer.

His briefing was said to be the first time the case was made public.

State investigation

Jennifer Houlton, director of communications for MDARD, told FeedNavigator today:

"This contamination incident underlines the importance of having a state feed testing program. The rapid actions of MDARD, in collaboration with other agencies, ensured the supply of safe food in the state.

Essentially, MDARD identified a safety issue in August, and, as part of our investigation process, it became evident that feed was the only common denominator between the birds.

We notified the FDA and the USDA of a possible toxicity related to feed and also to the high level of Lasalocid, an animal drug that is approved for use in poultry to prevent coccidiosis.

Upon further inquiry, the MDARD investigators discovered a link between the turkey contamination incident and the detection of adulterated grease in swine feed."

Lasalocid levels

Lasalocid, which is not approved for swine, was detected in samples of that grease.

Averill's report shows that the safe dosage level regarding the use of Lasalocid in turkey feed is 68 to 113 grams per ton but levels found in the dead turkeys at Sietsema Farms were much higher than that.

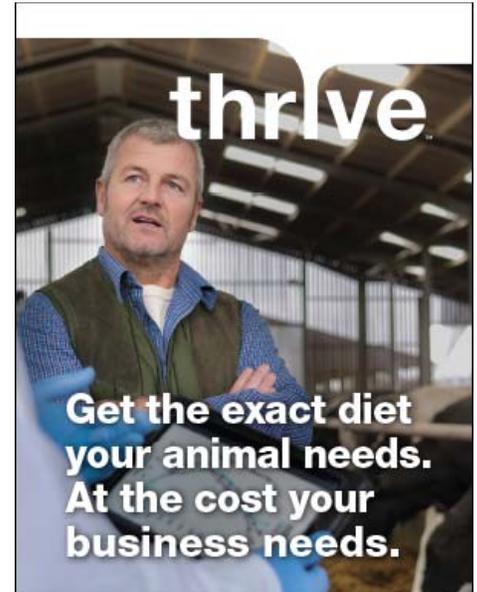
And the samples of swine feed from the same farm revealed the presence of up to 1,510 grams per ton of the drug, which raised the red flag for investigators.

Meanwhile, on October 23 last year Shur-Green Farms issued a [voluntarily recall](#) of lots of Soyoil containing Lascadoil, an industrial processing waste oil, which *"was intended for non-food product or bio-fuels but may have been used as a feed ingredient."*

The company said its decision to recall the product was the result of death in turkeys.

Houlton said MDARD is now awaiting the conclusions of federal probe: *"We want answers too so we can fully understand how this incident occurred."*

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