

Transcript of FDA Press Conference on Contaminated Animal Feed

FTS-HHS FDA

Moderator: Julie Zawisza

May 08, 2007

1:00 pm CT

Coordinator: Good afternoon and thank you all for holding. At this time, I'd like to inform you that your lines are on a listen only mode until the question and answer segment of the call today. This call is being recorded. If you do have any objections you may disconnect at this time.

I would now like to turn the call over to one of today's speakers, Ms. Julie Zawisza. Thank you ma'am, you may begin.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen, welcome. I'm Julie Zawisza, Assistant Commissioner for Public Affairs with FDA. I'd like to welcome you to this briefing this afternoon on the melamine investigation.

As you probably know, this is an inter-agency (operative client). And we have speakers today from the FDA, from the US Department of Agriculture and from Customs and Border Protection.

We also have several FDA officials here and officials from the other two agencies available to answer questions later on in this briefing.

We have three speakers this afternoon and they will make some brief remarks and then we'll go right into the Q&A. Our first speaker is Dr. David Acheson,

he's Assistant Commissioner for Food Protection with the FDA. Our second speaker will be Dr. Kenneth Petersen who is the Assistant Administrator for Field Operations with the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service.

Woman: Sure did, sure did.

Julie Zawisza: And our third speaker is Ms. Vera Adams, the Executive Director of Commercial Targeting and Enforcement with the US Customs and Border Protection.

Then during the question and answer segment, we have Dr. Stephen Sundlof who's the Director of our Center for Veterinary Medicine and FDA available. We have Captain David Elder who is Director of the Office of Enforcement with FDA and Mr. Michael Rogers, Director of the Division of Field Investigations and Mr. Walter Batts, Deputy Director of our Office of International Programs.

And I suspect we have several individuals as well from the USDA and Customs and Border Prevention who will – Protection, excuse me – who will step in as needed.

At this time, I'd like to turn it over to Dr. Acheson.

David Acheson: Thank you. This is David Acheson from FDA. This afternoon, I would like to address two issues with you all which are two new ones. And then, obviously a follow up to old issue, we'd be happy to address that in Q&A. But I'm going to focus on two.

The first is related to a misrepresentation of the wheat gluten and the concentrated rice protein. I want to preface this by saying that as you are all

aware, we've been following wheat gluten and rice protein concentrate from two sources in China and have undertaken a number of tests with those related to the detection of melamine and melamine-related compounds.

As part of our strategy, just to ensure that we're following this in all possible directions, a portion of those - of the wheat gluten and the rice protein concentrates that was already a concern because of melamine has been further analyzed by a forensic chemistry center.

And we've discovered that these products will look - labeled wheat gluten and rice protein concentrate are we believe mislabeled. And that they are - actually contain wheat flour that is contaminated with the melamine and melamine-related compound.

As we've discussed previously, none of these products have been used as ingredients directly in the human food supply. We're not talking about a new set of ingredients. These are the ones that we have been tracking since the beginning of this situation. We've just taking the analysis of those a little further.

And to reemphasize, what we've discovered is that these are not wheat gluten and rice protein concentrate but are in fact wheat flour contaminated with melamine.

The FDA considers this product to be mislabeled, based on what I've told you, and we're considering possible enforcement options. Again, I want to emphasize that these mislabeled products are the two Chinese firms that we previously discussed, previously identified in prior discussions and press conferences.

None of these changes the findings regarding the levels of melamine or melamine-related compounds in relation to the risk assessment and its feeding to animals. So, that part is essentially unchanged.

The second point that I want to raise relates to the issue of fish and fish meal. Again, as part of our ongoing trace backs and trace forwards, trying to understand where this contaminated wheat gluten may have gone, we learned that a portion of the mislabeled wheat gluten from the Chinese firms was sent to Canada.

And when in Canada, was used to manufacture fish meal. And that that fish meal was then imported back into the United States for use in feeding fish in certain industrial aquaculture type situation. As I said, this fish meal was made in Canada and the Canadian authorities are aware of our findings.

As with the situation with the poultry and the hogs, the levels that we're seeing in the fish meal are very comparable. And therefore, based on the risk effects we do not believe that there is any significant human health risk associated with consuming these fish.

The investigation is very active at this point. We know of a number of firms that received this fish meal. And our investigators are, as we speak, getting out there to those firms to determine just exactly what they are doing with the fish that were fed this fish meal.

We have so far, managed to get to one of these establishments where we confirmed the positive finding. And that particular establishment is dealing with very small fish - that the ones that are – I believe called fry or (smoke). So these are tiny fish that are not yet ready for human consumption anyway.

That is really just the current state of this investigation. This is obviously a new finding linking this to the fish meal and it's going to follow, I think, a very similar pattern as we have with the other investigation. We'll get out there. We will find out what's going on at the individual aquaculture facilities – industrial fish facilities and follow up as appropriate.

With that, I would like to hand back to Julie. Thank you.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you Dr. Acheson. Dr. Petersen with the US Department of Agriculture.

Kenneth Petersen: Okay, thank you and good afternoon everybody.

Yesterday, FSIS or USDA and FDA announced the results of a risk assessment that looked at the potential for adverse human effects from melamine and melamine compound. Based on the findings, the determination from that risk assessment that there wasn't – was a very low risk to human.

As announced yesterday, USDA and FDA are initiating the appropriate course of action regarding swine and poultry that consumed any contaminated feed.

In some cases, although the contaminated feed can be traced to farms, the feed that was actually consumed by the animals had a very low amount of the pet food scrap as we've previously discussed. That became so diluted – that feed became so diluted from the small amount of pet food scrap that any test no longer detected the presence of melamine and its compound. So, there was a negative feed test.

In those cases, as announced yesterday, some poultry have begun to be released. In other cases, the feed on the farms either tested positive for

melamine and melamine compounds or there was no feed available to test. Those swine and poultry are still being held either under state quarantine or voluntarily by the owners pending the results of an animal exposure risk assessment and any other investigatory findings. And both of those are underway.

The animal exposure assessment will provide us with additional scientific data about the level of melamine and its compound in animal tissues. And any decrease of the amount of melamine in animal's body as it's excreted through the urinary tract.

All of these will help us apply solid scientific data to supplement the science-based findings in the (unintelligible) risk assessment yesterday. So, although we expect that the animal exposure assessment will support the findings of the human risk assessment, we're continuing to take a measured approach until that assessment and the other information from the investigation is finished.

But if the risk assessment proves positive, we would expect the release for inspection and processing of all the swine and poultry that remain on hold in connection with this ongoing investigation.

We do expect to have the animal exposure assessment completed very soon, quite likely by the end of this week. Again, this is being conducted by an inter-agency group, comprised of representatives from FDA and FSIS, Customs and Border Protection, CDC and EPA. And with that, we'll turn it back to the moderator.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you Dr. Petersen. And we'll hear from our last speaker, Ms. Vera Adams with Customs and Border Protection.

Vera Adams: Thank you. To supplement the government effort to ensure that no further contaminated products (are running) the US, CBP has undertaken some additional sampling and testing of imported wheat and corn gluten as well as rice protein concentrate and isolates arriving from all countries destined for human and animal consumption.

Once we have taken the sampling, the sample – we send those samples to our laboratory systems where they will be testing for any contaminants and making sure that these products present no further risk.

There's really no evidence at this time to suggest that the bulk of these products present any risk or have any further contamination beyond what the FDA has already identified from the Chinese companies. However, we are conducting these wider tests as a precautionary step to ensure that these types of products entering through the US ports of entry are safe.

We do routinely conduct testing of products entering the United States. And we have seven regional labs throughout the country that mirror FDA procedures. Specifically, the sampling for the rice protein, wheat and corn gluten began last week. And we are working to get the results of those samples back as expeditiously as possible to add to the information pool for this wider government effort. Thank you.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you, Vera. At this time, ladies and gentlemen, we will take your questions.

Coordinator: Okay...

Julie Zawisza: And please state your name and affiliation.

Coordinator: To ask a question, please press “Star 1”. “Star 1” if you would like to ask a question. One moment.

Julie Zawisza: (Ask you to) stand by, I think we're having technical difficulty. It'll just be a moment.

Coordinator: Andrew Martin, you may ask your question and please state your affiliation.

Andrew Martin: Hi. I'm with the New York Times. A quick question for Ms. Adams and then for Dr. Acheson. You said you're testing wheat, corn gluten and rice protein concentrate and we just heard that in fact it was wheat flour. So, I'm wondering if they're testing the wrong thing.

And then I wanted to ask Dr. Acheson, if you could explain further how you sort of determined that this wasn't in fact wheat gluten and rice protein concentrate. I don't know what these things look like but is it that readily apparent?

Vera Adams: This is Vera. I'll answer your question. If it's misrepresented as wheat gluten then it's important that we target wheat gluten. And in addition, we're constantly in contact with FDA and USDA to evaluate whether what we need to be targeting and testing needs to be changed.

Andrew Martin: Thank you.

Vera Adams: Uh hmm.

David Acheson: This is David Acheson. Try to answer the second part of your question. First of all, I just – just to maybe clarify a point, this product did come into the

United States labeled as wheat gluten and rice protein concentrate. So if that's what's being targeted, it would have – they would find there.

In terms of how do we discover this, it was combination of (AFFA's) that were done this – to determine this. First of all, using something called stereoscopic light microscopy and polarized light microscopy. And this essentially it just characterizes the product initially. And it's just sophisticated direct visual microscopy.

And that's been followed by a type of chromatography that is looking specifically at levels of starch. And it's based on those two criteria that the forensic chemistry center was able to determine that the levels in starch that we found in these products was such that it made it likely that it was wheat flour.

Julie Zawisza: Andrew, do you have a follow up?

Andrew Martin: So, does that change – I know the other day, Dr. Acheson, you said you're going out to various manufacturers that use this stuff to see if it's contaminated – does that change your protocols now? Are you also going to look at wheat flour or is it just specifically looking at things that are labeled as wheat gluten and rice protein concentrate?

David Acheson: The focus is on the rice – things that are labeled as wheat gluten and rice protein concentrate, as were these. We are, as I've said before, planning on expanding the assignments as we learn more, and as we get the ingredient side of this figured out.

I don't exclude the possibility that we will get into sampling wheat flour specifically. But right now, that's not the top priority. This was not coming in labeled as wheat flour. It's coming in labeled as wheat gluten.

Andrew Martin: Thank you.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you. Next question.

Coordinator: Brian Hartman, you may ask your question.

Brian Hartman: Yeah, hi. Well, first up, I was in early but the whole top of the call didn't get picked up. And then my real question is why - given that China's manufacturers and agricultural sector and pretty much everything in China that's coming from China, every sector seems to have a problem. Should you expand everything, your investigation of everything that comes across the border from China at this point?

David Acheson: This David Acheson from FDA. What we're doing is trying to expand our assessment based on where we're seeing the risk. And this is, if you've been following the story, this is shifting constantly. We started out with the focus on a single company then expanded to import alert on the two companies.

That subsequently expanded to import alert of all protein concentrates coming in from China. We're extending that into sampling strategies for pet food coming in that could contain melamine as well as animal feed.

So, it is expanding as we go. And as you heard from our colleagues at Customs and Borders Protection, it's - they are also expanding it.

I think one has to focus this on a risk-basis. You have to put the resources where you believe the risk to be greatest and we're moving the resources based on that. And we'll continue to do that.

Brian Hartman: I guess my question is what don't we know that's being put in Chinese products and shipped into the US. I mean we didn't know about melamine or hearing about this cat fish that have antibiotics and chemicals in them. I mean what don't we know because we're not looking at it?

David Acheson: Well if I could tell you what we don't know, I'd know. So, I mean that's not meant to be a (facetious) answer but it's the only logical one I can come up with.

We are not just looking for melamine. We have screens for a whole range of chemical compound. And we are putting this material through those screens. So, this is not a melamine focus solely. We're looking for a variety of other things just in case, based on nothing other than we – we have the technology, we have the samples that makes us smart, to look more broadly.

But obviously, we know we're keeping our eyes open. We're working with the center for disease control and prevention. If we start to see unusual spikes of unexplicable illness, clearly we'd ask those questions.

So, we're being as broad as we can within – but making maximum use of resources.

Julie Zawisza: Brian, you said you missed the top of the briefing. What...

Brian Hartman: Yeah, I don't want to waste everyone's time. But is there might be other people that I know at least one of person of the person here at ABC missed the

top of the briefing because we were waiting in the queue. I don't know if other people are – or is there other people, then maybe you want to redo it. Otherwise, I don't want to waste everyone else's time.

Julie Zawisza: All right. What we'll do is we're going go ahead and take questions and keep this moving. And then - well, we will have a replay that will be available in an hour. But what I may ask the speakers to do at the end of your very quickly summarize what you presented earlier on. (Unintelligible). So, let's take some questions first. Next question.

Coordinator: (Vitra Henderson), you may ask your question.

(Vitra Henderson): Hi. Thanks for doing this. I was also stuck in the queue and picked up the call about the fish meal made in Canada stage. Following up on the caller's question about the antibiotics sent in – Chinese imported catfish, is that one of the areas where the FDA is looking at a higher risk import? And are you looking at that catfish in Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and testing it for melamine.

David Acheson: The short answer to that question is yes. We have an assignment that is already on the way. It's part of our risk-based approach to protecting the food supply. That's an assignment which is focused on obtaining and testing a range of different fish samples looking for antibiotic residues and other things.

We have, just very recently, validated an (AFFA) for melamine and fish. That is something that we did not have a week ago. Our (AFFA) teams have been moving really fast and we now have the validated (AFFA) from melamine in fish. And that is going to be added into our screening looking for the antibiotic residues.

That's something that we've added in. We're going to go in and test the - any remaining fish samples that we have that are coming in the lab as part of this assignment. And as new samples come in, we will test those melamine-related compound.

Now, depending what we find on that testing, that is going to drive next step. Obviously, if we find levels, particularly, if there is significant, that's going to have a different series of next steps then if these are negative. Again, it's focused on whether risks are likely to be and the resources that we have to devote to it.

(Vitra Henderson): Thank you very much.

Julie Zawisza: Next question please.

Coordinator: Our next questioner is (David Crute). You may ask your question, state your affiliation.

(David Curly): Is that (David Curly)?

Julie Zawisza: (David).

(David Curly): Sorry about that. It appears that the Chinese news agencies now saying that China believes that these two companies exported this - added the melamine illegally and exported it to get around inspection. Is that your understanding of what you think happened?

David Acheson: This is David Acheson from the FDA. As you know, our investigators are currently on the ground in China asking those very kinds of questions. We're working closely with the Chinese authorities both from Washington as well as

locally. And I think as the investigation unfolds, we will have more definitive answers as to what exactly happened in China or potential explanation as to why it happened.

(David Curly): But this seems to be a complete turn around. Which story should we believe? I mean we're further down the road, do you think that the Chinese have finally accepted the fact that this is what's happened?

David Acheson: I can't speak, I'm afraid, from FDA as to what the Chinese have accepted. We're following this up on first principles. And our main concern is that we have these food items coming into the United States that contain agents that they shouldn't. And we're following that up. As to exactly why it happened in China is part of the investigations of the Chinese they're undertaking, again, with our investigators.

Obviously, in the longer term, those questions are important in terms of trying to make sure that doesn't happen again.

(David Curly): Finally, your inspectors have been there a week, anything you can share, anything at all?

David Acheson: At this point, they're – it's just - it's still ongoing. They're out there. I know that they are getting to the establishment or some of the most concern. I really don't have anymore specifics at this point that I can share.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you. Next question.

Coordinator: (Rick Wick), you may ask your (question).

Rick Weiss: Hi, Rick Weiss, Washington Post. First I'll just say that a couple of us here in Washington also only managed to get in on this thing after you had done your initial stuff. So, you might want to recap that sooner rather than later because maybe there are some questions about that that we don't know to ask because we don't know what you said.

Julie Zawisza: We'll do that after your question.

Rick Weiss: Okay. But I did catch the last word of it. It sounded like it was something about wheat flour instead wheat gluten and that makes me wonder whether to the extent you're finding out that this is about flour instead of gluten or something. Is there any new – is anything in this new information - add to the possibility that some of this stuff has entered the human food supply directly as opposed to only being used for ingredients for pet food and so on?

Julie Zawisza: (Rick), I'm going to ask you to hold in the queue and ask Dr. Acheson to go back and summarize the points he made at the top.

Rick Weiss: Thank you.

Julie Zawisza: Sounds like a lot of people didn't hear that. And they will be disadvantage in that kind of questions that they want to ask. Will that be okay, Dr. Acheson?

David Acheson: Absolutely, yeah. And I apologize that that happened. It's probably because we started on time.

Julie Zawisza: Yes, I think so.

David Acheson: Let me recap. I – and apologize for those that were and hearing this the second time. I focused on two issues. And we've touched on both of them during the

questions so far. The first was the issue of wheat gluten and the rice protein concentrate being misrepresented as wheat gluten and rice protein concentrate.

And through a series of follow up testing which I just addressed in a follow up question, our lab determined that in fact, the wheat gluten and the rice protein concentrate contained wheat flour and were in fact wheat flour contaminated with melamine and melamine-related compounds.

I want to emphasize that the material that was tested that we found to be the wheat flour was the same sample - the same material that have been tested positive for melamine. It does not represent new batches from different companies, different countries with yet another problem. It is the same melamine contaminated material which we have just taken to a next level of testing and analysis.

So, not only does it have melamine in it which it shouldn't, but it's also mislabeled in that it's labeled as wheat gluten and rice protein concentrate, but is in fact wheat flour.

So, I want to emphasize that even though we've been talking about gluten all down the line here, and I realize that this is just a perfect storm for total confusion, that what we have been calling gluten and everything that applied to our statements about gluten, we've now determined that even though it was labeled as gluten, we all thought it was gluten, it was used as gluten, it wasn't. It was mislabeled and was actually wheat flour.

So, that was essentially my point there. And again, to emphasize this wheat flour material came from the same two companies in China that we've been discussing ever since the beginning of this.

It doesn't impact the human side of this. We do not believe that any of these ingredients have gone directly into the human food chain. That's – none of that is changed. And again, just to summarize, we're talking about the wheat gluten and the rice protein concentrate.

Back in...

Rick Weiss: So, if I may follow up on that and...

David Acheson: Can I just finish my second point (unintelligible)...

Rick Weiss: Okay, I'm sorry. Go ahead.

David Acheson: Uh hmm. And then we can come back to your questions.

The second thing that I covered was the fact that we have discovered melamine in fish meal. And this is a situation in which again, through trace backs, we determined that some of the – some of the products from the companies in China had been imported directly to Canada. And the Canadian had used that product to manufacture fish meal that was then imported into the United States and sent to a number of aquaculture and other fishing industry establishments in the United States.

We're working with the Canadian authorities on this. They're well aware of what's going on. At this point, based on the risk assessment, we – and the levels that we know of in the fish meal as with the hogs and the poultry, we do not believe that this poses any significant human health threat.

This is a new finding. It's a very active part of the investigation. Our investigators are getting out to the establishments where we know this was

received. And we'll be doing some analysis, getting some more samples and determining the status of the fish that may have been fed this.

But I want to emphasize at this point, based on the risk assessment, even if these fish have them fed this fish meal, we believe that the risk to humans is low.

So, those are my - the two points that I summarized. So, now, I can go to your question. Thank you for waiting.

Rick Weiss: Okay.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you.

Rick Weiss: Thanks very much for that. I'm going to change my question quickly then. What got done to the fish meal in Canada that changed? You said it was imported as fish meal and then exported from Canada to the US as fish meal, did something get done to it in Canada? And how many fish do you think were fed this stuff?

David Acheson: Now, I'm sorry if I said that, I didn't mean that. But it was imported into Canada as wheat gluten.

Rick Weiss: Okay, all right.

David Acheson: The contaminated wheat gluten went into Canada just like it did into the US.

Rick Weiss: Uh hmm.

David Acheson: We use this to make pet food. They use it to make fish meal. You with me?

Rick Weiss: Yup. And how many fish ate it?

David Acheson: Don't know. That's part of the investigation. We do have a list of potential recipients of this fish meal. And our investigators are getting out to those establishments as we speak to answer that very question.

Rick Weiss: Thank you.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you. Next question.

Coordinator: Karen Roebuck, you may ask your question. (And please state your affiliation).

Karen Roebuck: Hi. This is Karen Roebuck with the Pittsburgh Tribune Review. Did you just call on me? I'm having trouble hearing.

Julie Zawisza: Yes, we did Karen. You're on.

Karen Roebuck: Okay. Thanks for taking my call. The – well, it's not expected that people would get sick in the short term from eating the contaminated food. Are the various federal agencies who studied this ruling out the possibility of long term health effects from consuming the compounds over time since kidney damage is cumulative?

And also, health effects aside, Dr. Petersen had said last week that the pigs that had eaten the adulterated food legally could not be put in to the market because they knew that they ate the adulterated food, yet now it seems that those - even though you know they ate the adulterated food and that the

chickens ate the adulterated food, they are going into the market. Is that – to sum it, the question is how would that be legal?

Julie Zawisza: The first part of the question sounds like it may be Dr. Acheson, the second part, Dr. Petersen.

David Acheson: Yeah. Your question on the first part which was addressing the long term exposure consequences. Well, first of all, we don't know for a fact that this has been long term exposure. We don't even know for a fact yet that melamine has gone into the human food supply other than via hogs and poultry at extremely low level.

My best answer to your question on the long term health effects, is as I've said before, we're working with CDC in looking for any shifts in trend. At this point, we can't rule it out. I think this may become more apparent as further work around this evolve because obviously, one of the questions is feeding studies of these kinds of level to animals under research conditions to answer those very questions.

So, at this point, I can't specifically rule anything, you know, rule anything out other than to say there's absolutely no evidence to suggest that that's happening.

And then I'll turn the second part over to Dr. Petersen.

Kenneth Petersen: Okay, thank you. Last week, when we first started discussing that some of these contaminated feed have been fed to the swine, it was – the initial discussion was to swine. We had very little information and in fact that was about all the information we have, that some level of contaminated feed have been fed to swine.

And so, based on that limited information, we took what was we thought the most aggressive approach for protecting public health which was for us not to apply the mark of inspection to any of those animals.

Subsequently, there has been additional information and much of it quite significant that's come along. We've learned a little bit more about the low amount of melamine that was in the pet food and then the low amount of pet food that's made its way into the animal feed.

And that the exposure if anything to the animals was brief. And that we have no reason to believe there's any concentration of the melamine in the actual meat of the animal.

So, we've learned a lot there. And then, over the weekend, much of our initial scientific judgment was further clarified through the risk assessment which basically showed that even if you assumed the most extreme – even if you take the most extreme position on exposure, the risk was just 2500 times or so below any known possible risk.

So, we started a week or so ago with limited information and at the time, I still believe the appropriate decision was for us not to apply the mark of inspection. But now, given all that information and given that we have specific farms where the feed tested negative - that now FSIS is in a position to apply the mark of inspection to those animals.

And then there's this other group of animals where we're still missing some information. Either the feed test was positive or there's no feed available to test. And so, we're still taking a precautionary approach to those until other facts come along.

So that's – I realize it looks like a shifting position but it shifted as facts have been put on the table. And whenever those facts have put us in a position to make sure that public was well served, that's what we've done.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you. We'd like to just take a moment and go back to this issue of wheat flour and explain the significance of our findings that we have in fact wheat flour and not wheat gluten or rice protein concentrates. May I ask Dr. Acheson? Please speak to that.

David Acheson: Yeah, let me try to just make sure that everybody understands some of the background to this because it's complicated. And I want to just point out that wheat gluten is a component of wheat flour. So, if you start with wheat flour and you can essentially go through in a process in which you wash the starch away, thereby leaving the wheat gluten.

The wheat gluten is the protein part. That's the piece when you want high wheat protein, it's the wheat gluten that you end up with and the starch is just washed out. So, the wheat gluten is a component of overall wheat flour.

Now, this is the point at which we become speculative. But it may throw some light onto how does this all fit together. It's certainly a simpler process in which a manufacturer would take wheat flour or whole wheat, simply grind it up. Thereby, it would still have some wheat gluten in it at a low level. But it wouldn't be concentrated because the starch is still there.

So, its total protein content would appear to be low. If you then add melamine to that, what you're effectively doing is you're adding a source of nitrogen to it. And when you do that, if your measurement of protein is actually measuring nitrogen, what you've got is a wheat based product that appears to

have high protein because the nitrogen is high due to the addition of melamine.

Now, there is a plausible hypothesis as to why this would be done rather than taking the trouble to extract the wheat gluten and wash away the starch, you simply grind up the wheat, put it all together and then artificially create the appearance of it being high in protein by adding a high nitrogen containing compound such as melamine.

I hope that explanation hasn't muddied the water further. And obviously, we can take question if it has. But that may help explain what is going on here.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you Dr. Acheson. Next question please?

Coordinator: (Unintelligible) (Doreen), you may ask your question and state your company name.

(Doreen): Sure. I'm with Reuters. I want to know if Dr. Petersen could just go through the numbers real quick as far as there is 6,000 (hogs) and then can you tell me how many chickens we're still dealing with. Are we finding about the chickens in Indiana and has anything come of the investigation in Missouri plant?

Kenneth Petersen: Okay. This is Dr. Petersen. The – we mentioned last Friday, I believe that it was that of course we're on the cusp the information from the risk assessment last Friday. And so, we had asked that approximately 20 million young chickens – broilers be voluntarily held until we had a chance over the weekend to assess that risk assessment. So those were held.

And then with yesterday's announcement, most of those where that at least of them so approximately 10 million have begun to move into slaughter channels.

And so those were the ones that were associated with a negative feed test. So they met the provisions that we laid out in yesterday's announcement with FDA.

Then the other ones on poultry that you mentioned in Indiana are still the approximately 100,000, perhaps a little bit less of the breeder birds that are still being voluntary – they're on hold. I don't recall if it's voluntary or not.

At those facilities and because they didn't - we don't quite have a negative test on those at this point. So those would be subject to the other information that I mentioned that we're working through this week. Otherwise, the rest of the numbers are what we previously mentioned,

(Doreen): So the other - there was I think 30 broiler farms and then eight breeder farms in Indiana. So the other like three million birds there, they've been – good to go? And then what about the other 10 million birds that you're – of the 20 million from Friday, you said ten million have begun...

((Crosstalk))

Kenneth Petersen: I'm sorry. Could you repeat just the last part of that?

(Doreen): Yeah, sure. The first part was on the - the other three million in Indiana and then you were also talking about the 20 million birds that you're – that was announced on Friday. You said 10 million have begun to move because they tested negative. What about the other 10 million?

Kenneth Petersen: (Unintelligible)

(Doreen): And then hogs, does there...

Kenneth Petersen: Okay. The other 10 million are eligible to move. They're just – because they got the information yesterday, they got to queue them up to the appropriate slaughter facilities.

(Doreen): Okay.

Kenneth Petersen: The three million you mentioned was really I think the hard number there was 2.7 million. That goes back a week or so ago which were birds in Indiana from the roughly 30 farms, I believe, that had already made their way into commerce. Those were ones that were slaughtered back in sometime in March, we believe.

And then there's one other piece of information about animals on hold. There are some animals at several farms on hold in the state of Illinois. And it looks like approximately three facilities. Those number of swine on hold is approximately 50,000. And those animals, we don't have a negative test. And so, they are subject to the other provisions that we announced yesterday - informations from the animal risk assessment or other investigatory findings.

And so, those – that's kind of the new piece of animals that are on hold subject to what we had yesterday. So that's pretty much what we have in total. The broilers are the ones that are really moving to market today.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you. Next question.

Coordinator: (Daniel Rontenick), you may ask your question and...

(Daniel Rontenick): Hello.

Coordinator: ...your company name.

(Daniel Rontenick): Yes. This is – I'm with CNN. Thanks very much for taking my call. Quick question, do you know how the wheat flour – how do you know how the wheat flour in the fish meal was contaminated? Are there samples available for testing that?

David Acheson: This is David Acheson of FDA. Yes, we tested the fish meal and it was positive.

(Daniel Rontenick): Okay, and follow up question. Now that the risk assessment for melamine and feed for livestock is low, does that mean that you will then allow the pet food companies to sell all the recalled food to livestock companies as long as it's used in a small amount?

David Acheson: I would ask Dr. Sundlof or David Elder to address that, from the FDA.

Stephen Sundlof: This is Steve Sundlof and the answer, you know, that we consider that any of the test positive to be adulterated and could not be used to further process into animal feed.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you. Next question.

Coordinator: Heather Harlan, you may ask your question. And state your affiliation.

Heather Harlan: Hi. This is Heather Harlan with NHK Japan. Thank you for taking my question. How long will the FDA investigators stay in China? When are they coming back?

David Acheson: This is David Acheson of FDA. Excuse me. The current schedule has them coming back to the United States early next week.

Heather Harlan: Do you know which day?

David Acheson: No.

Heather Harlan: Okay.

Julie Zawisza: Anything else, Heather?

Heather Harlan: No, that's it.

Julie Zawisza: Okay. Thank you. Next question.

Coordinator: Abigail Goldman. Please state your name and your affiliation please.

Abigail Goldman: Hi. Abigail Goldman, Los Angeles Times. I have a couple of questions. First of all, you've said there – you don't know how many fish, can you tell us how many fish farms or aquaculture establishments? Also, what kind of fish? And then, as regards to the wheat flour, regardless of what the label said that - doesn't that alert you that wheat flour have been adulterated and that all wheat flours should be tested?

I understand that what you're testing now is mislabeled but that tells you there's a problem with that broader product. Thank you.

David Acheson: This is David Acheson of FDA. With regards to your first question, we do have a preliminary list of places that we're following up on and we're trying to confirm that. That's part of the validation and investigation process. So at this point, we don't have a definitive list of numbers and how many names that I can share with you.

With regards to wheat flour, again, it was not – even though the wheat flour contained melamine, it came into the United States labeled as wheat gluten or rice protein concentrate.

At this stage, we don't have direct indication that product coming into the United States labeled as wheat flour is anything other than wheat flour. We're certainly talking to our field force about extending the assignment that we have to look at some wheat flour, to test it, to begin to go down that avenue. But at this stage, it was – we have no reason to believe that wheat flour being imported as wheat flour is problematic.

Abigail Goldman: And the kinds of fish that these aquaculture establishments produce?

David Acheson: That we'll know that better - that when we visit them. And that's the kind of information that we obtain when we go and talk to them.

Abigail Goldman: Thank you.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you, next question.

Coordinator: Andrew Bridges, you may state your name and company please.

Andrew Bridges: You stated my name, Associated Press. Where did – who exported the wheat gluten or purported wheat gluten to the Canadians? And why are you learning this only now? And then also, are you looking at imports of fish meal from China or other sources, Chile of example, as well as poultry that may have fed meal within China that potentially could have been contaminated? So, three questions I guess.

David Acheson: Well, I'm not sure I caught all three of them but let me try this. The first one, it came from the Chinese firms that we previously had concern about.

Andrew Bridges: But who handled it then or in them here in United States?

David Acheson: Who handled it?

Andrew Bridges: Uh hmm. Who imported it and then who re-exported it?

David Acheson: Well, it came in – it came directly from, I think it came through ChemNutra.

Man: Brokers through ChemNutra.

David Acheson: Right. It was brokered through ChemNutra directly to Canada. That wheat gluten never came to the United States. It went directly to Canada, used by the Canadian company to manufacture the fish meal. It was only when we started to get into the depth of the records from ChemNutra and started to look outside of the United States piece, that these came to light.

And then it was a question of, “okay. Well, it went to this Canadian company, what did they do with it?” and then that led to the discovery that it was turned into fish meal and some of that fish meal then came back into the United States.

Andrew Bridges: Does it disturb you that ChemNutra didn't disclose this that they weren't more up front? That they'd actually sold also or brokered least to...

David Acheson: I think...

Andrew Bridges ...wheat gluten to human food or to companies that make meals that goes into food products beyond just the pet food company they supplied?

David Acheson: I would have to talk to our investigators as to the questions that they've specifically asked of ChemNutra. I'm not aware that ChemNutra are withholding information from us deliberately. So, I don't think this was simply as our investigators were pursuing this to the next level because initially we were concerned about product coming directly into the United States. That's where it started out.

And that's typical with any investigations outbreak, trace back, that's the whole point of it. One thing leads to another, leads to another, leads to another. And what – you know, like some issues we dealt with before. You're seeing outbreak investigations, you're seeing a food related incident unfold.

So, it's going to change with time. And it's always easy and with the retrospect scope to say, "Well, why didn't you? Why didn't you ask that question two weeks ago? Why didn't you know that three months ago? And I wish we had. But, you know, that's the process of discovery.

Andrew Bridges: Okay, I'm sorry. Just as a follow up - are you looking at fish meal imports now from China as well as say, poultry imports from China that may have been fed - from birds that may have been fed contaminated feed?

David Acheson: We're looking at a variety of animal feed coming in from China, specifically, fish meal. I would ask whether Michael Rogers or David Elder have any specifics on that, if not we could get them to you.

Julie Zawisza: He needs a mic.

David Acheson: Sure.

Michael Rogers: Michael Rogers. We're certainly taking a risk-based approach. We're looking at – currently, we certainly have in place now the country wide import alert that's focused on all vegetable protein products from China and the domestic sampling assignment certainly at the border as well as the (unintelligible) of this products.

But we're going to be using a risk-based approach to identify what other products from China and even possible transshipped through other countries that we should be focused on.

Julie Zawisza: Okay, thank you, Andrew. Next question.

Coordinator: Julie Smith, you may ask your question and state your affiliation please.

Julie Smith: I'm Julie Smith with USA Today. For Dr. Acheson, would it be reasonable to assume that some company among the supply chain would have discovered before now that the product wasn't a protein concentrate at all but a wheat flour or not because they only test for protein level?

David Acheson: Well, I mean, that's an interesting question. And I think that, when a company typically gets a product in, they will do their quality control of that product.

Different companies will have different degrees of quality control. Does it meet the standards of what their standard is?

If it doesn't, they will typically reject it. They're not going to ask questions, "Well, why doesn't it? What's the problem with it?" They'll just simply say, "This shipment doesn't meet our standards, doesn't do for us what we need it to do" and reject it.

They don't necessarily have an obligation to tell anybody about that. That's just an internal decision. So I can't rule out the possibility that the companies got their stuff in and it didn't perform as wheat gluten and therefore they rejected it.

Julie Zawisza: Anything else...

Julie Smith: I'm sorry, so explain that last part again. I mean, the companies all along have been saying they use the wheat gluten and the rice protein concentrates?

David Acheson: Yeah, they did because they – my understanding of that is that they didn't know it wasn't wheat gluten. They assumed it was wheat gluten. The pet...

Julie Smith: With an average amount of due diligence, should they have discovered that?

David Acheson: That's up to their quality control, in the context of their manufacturing processes. So, I mean we're talking initially about the pet food manufacturers. I don't know what level of quality control they go through to ensure that when they receive something labeled as wheat gluten, they ensure that it is wheat gluten.

Julie Smith: Okay. And then finally, the – it's somewhat easier to see how, you know, the wheat flour is one step on the process to wheat gluten but – so saying the rice protein concentrate was not a rice-based product at all?

David Acheson: That's my understanding. Yes.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you. Next question.

Coordinator: Jane Zhang, you may ask your question and state your affiliation.

Jane Zhang: Hi, I'm with the Wall Street Journal. Thanks for taking my call. I'm just wondering - is FDA or, you know, USDA or other agencies are – are you guys thinking about some broad changes in regulation of animal feed since, you know, it seems like there is a pattern here. You know, hogs, chicken, fish and are you looking at other animal feed too or...?

Julie Zawisza: Okay. And Dr. Sundlof is going to take that question.

Stephen Sundlof: Yes. We have been for the last couple of years, we're working on a more comprehensive animal feed safety system. And we've been holding a number of public meetings and there will be another public meeting this month, I believe it's either May 21 or May 22 that really addresses a lot of these questions about, "how do you have a better overall safety system for your feed?"

Previously, our feed safety programs have been targeted at specific issues such as BSC or Mad Cow disease or Salmonella program or a medicated feed program in which feed meals actually mixed drugs into the feeds and have to do these under just under good manufacturing practice standards.

But we have not had really an overall comprehensive program that looks at safety from a broader perspective such that it would catch problems like we've seen with the melamine. So that is a work in progress.

Jane Zhang: Thank you. Next question.

Coordinator: Debra Pettit, you may ask your question and state your affiliation.

Debra Pettit: Hi. Debra Pettit. Hello?

Julie Zawisza: Debra, who are you with?

Debra Pettit: I'm with NBC. I'm - actually, I'm going to pass because my questions have already been asked.

Julie Zawisza: Okay, thanks. Next question.

Coordinator: John Rucker, you may ask your question and state your affiliation.

John Rucker: Hi. I'm with the Baltimore Sun. So, if we can just go back for a second to why this may be wheat flour. You talked about how the production process was simpler. Is this also – is it also cheaper? Is this part of sort of disguising a cheaper product to something more expensive?

David Acheson: This is David Acheson. One (would) assume that it's a simpler or cheaper but I don't have a specific economic analysis of that. And I certainly can't speak of the economic advantages or disadvantages of one over the other.

I want to emphasize that it's only the positive sample that we have found - the melamine positive sample that we have found to be wheat flour. This is not to

suggest that every sample of wheat gluten and every ingredient with wheat gluten and rice protein concentrate coming into the US is wheat flour. We have no evidence of that.

It was a further follow up of the melamine positive sample. I want to make sure that you all understand that.

John Rocker: If I could just have a follow up.

Julie Zawisza: Quickly.

John Rocker: Yeah, sure. What are these fish farms, these aquaculture, what are they doing? Do you have any idea, are they breeding fish for, you know, for what purpose?

David Acheson: Typically, they're doing it for two purposes. One is to breed fish to go directly into commerce as commercial – as fish for human consumption. And the other is they're stocks to put in reservoirs and lakes and stream.

John Rocker: Thank you.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you. (Oley) we have time for one more question.

Coordinator: Okay. Lynn Carey you may ask your question and state your affiliation.

Lynn Carey: The Oregonian. Several of my questions have been answered but I still have few others. The state – could you possibly give the state that the farms are in – the fish farms. I'm curious about the percentage of – are they setting a diet of 100% of this fish meal? And do we have any sense of how long these two companies have been exporting to North America?

David Acheson: With regard to your first question, at this stage, I'm not able to disclose which states are under investigation. As I've said, that's active and as of right this point in time, we – I can't discuss that further.

To your second question as to how long these companies have been importing products into the United States. I don't – I know it goes back to 2006. I will ask Michael Rogers or David Elder if they have any sense that we have information beyond that.

David Elder: Okay, this is David Elder. Dr. Acheson has stated the investigation is ongoing. We will be confirming the details as we progress with the investigation. But at this point in time, we don't have any information to extend at any further back.

Lynn Carey: Can I ask you something though? Are you working with the Canadians at all? Because if...

David Elder: Of course we are.

Lynn Carey: ...they work with the United States, they were probably exporting to Canada as well.

David Acheson: Yeah. No, absolutely, we're – this is David Acheson of FDA. We're working very closely with the Canadians on this.

Lynn Carey: And do you know what percentage the fish meal is of the diet, is it 100%. Are these fish that 100% fish meal?

David Acheson: Dr. Sundlof?

Stephen Sundlof: No, fish meal would a component of the total feed and I can't tell you exactly what proportion of that it is but it's probably less than half.

Julie Zawisza: Thank you. That was first, Dr. Acheson and David Elders and Dr. Stephen Sundlof.

Stephen Sundlof: Right.

Julie Zawisza: Right, okay. Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, at this time I'd like to close this briefing and thank you for your participation. I hope that you found it helpful. And thank you to our FDA speakers and our colleagues, Dr. Kenneth Petersen with the USDA and Ms. Vera Adams with US Customs and Border Protection for their participation today.

If you have follow up questions, please don't hesitate to call each of our respective agencies. And we will plan to do another briefing on - tentatively scheduled on Thursday. Time, yet to be determined and if we need to get you before that, we certainly will but we'll keep you updated as more information becomes available.

Thanks again and have a pleasant afternoon.

And the replay will be available in about one hour. Thank you very much.
Good evening – have a good evening. Bye-bye.

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