

**FDA Press Conference on Contaminated Animal Feed**

**FTS-HHS FDA**

**Moderator: Julie Zawisza**

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**01:00 pm CT**

Coordinator: Welcome and thank you all for standing by. At this time I would like to remind parties that your lines are in a listen-only mode until the question and answer session. At which time you may press star-1 to ask a question.

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

I will now turn the meeting over to Michael Herndon.

Thank you. You may begin.

Michael Herndon: Thank you very much, (Rose).

And ladies and gentlemen, welcome. I am Mike Herndon from the FDA's Media Relations Staff, and thanks and welcome to this briefing on the melamine investigation.

We have speakers today from the Food and Drug Administration and the US Customs and Border Protection and also have several FDA officials here, and officials from USDA, Customs and Border Protection available to answer any questions later on in this briefing.

Our two speakers this afternoon are Dr. David Acheson, Assistant Commissioner for Food Protection with the FDA, and Vera Adams, Executive Director for Commercial Targeting and Enforcement, Customs and Border Protection.

We will have a brief question and answer segment after the opening remarks.

Now at this time I will turn it over to Dr. David Acheson.

David Acheson: Thank you Mike. This is David Acheson of FDA.

There are a couple of areas that I just want to update you on today. The first relates to the information that we have on the status of the fish farms and the hatcheries, and the second is where we are on our inspections and investigations, both of the import side of things as well as the domestic protein surveillance assignment that we've done.

So, to begin with, the general overview, and this is information that we provided before but let me just provide this as an overview, that Skretting, the Canadian fish feed maker, have recalled the fish feed containing melamine from all commercial fisheries and fish hatcheries that received it.

And to remind you, that this wheat gluten that Skretting received from China which was contaminated with melamine and melamine related compounds is from the same company that led to the pet food recalls.

Based on the safety risk assessment conducted by the various federal agencies, there's very low risk of harm from eating fish that consumed this melamine tainted feed.

As we've said before, Skretting has 198 customers in the United States. Two of those are commercial fish farms, and one - and the remainder are hatcheries, so 196 hatcheries and two commercial farms. And I'm going to say more about both of those in just a minute.

Of those two commercial farms, one is in Hawaii and the other is in Washington State.

So to give you a little more depth on the fish farms themselves - and I'm going to be speaking here initially just about the two commercial operations -- firstly with regard to the Hawaiian operation, testing on fish conducted for Kona Blue, the Hawaiian fish farm, by a private lab, but using the method developed and endorsed by FDA as well as direct testing by our own labs have proved negative for melamine. And I repeat, this is testing of the fish from that fish farm have been negative for melamine.

As a result of this, the company Kona Blue, has resumed harvesting its fish after they voluntarily suspended sales pending the results of these tests.

The second firm in Washington State is a firm called American Gold. They have also had their fish tested by us, by FDA, and those too have proved to be negative for melamine.

FDA was not able to test any of the feed at American Gold because it had all been consumed by the fish. So just to recap there, both (commercial) companies, the one in Hawaii and Washington state have both had negative results on the testing of the fish themselves.

Finally, a point on the hatcheries.

As we've said before, the fish in these hatcheries are tiny, the feed has been recalled, so they are no longer being exposed to the feed, and therefore that combined with the fact that they are tiny fish we believe there is no public health concern associated with these fish in the hatcheries. And the destiny for these fish in the hatcheries is ultimately to be released into a variety of public water, not going straight directly into commerce.

Turning now to the second main area on the inspection front, and first I want to focus on the import alert, I'll give you a little bit of an update on that.

Since April 27, a total of 46 shipments of vegetable protein products from China have been detained as part of this import alert. To date, none of the importers have proved that the shipments are melamine-free, so these products remain in detention.

And before any of these shipments are released, FDA will review the analytical reports for technical accuracy, and we may collect and analyze notice samples of the product to confirm any submitted reports.

So, currently there are still samples detained as part of this import alert, and as I've said that they'll remain in detention until we're satisfied.

Moving on to the domestic protein surveillance assignment, and again to remind you this is an assignment that's been going on now for a couple of weeks, it is focused on domestic manufacturers who receive vegetable protein concentrates from China primarily.

What we have done there is with the assistance of states and locals our inspector's investigators have gone into those companies, raised awareness

about the importance of knowing everything there is to know about suppliers, and have collected samples for testing for melamine.

Currently we've collected 63 samples as part of this assignment from a variety of states. These include Arizona, California, Connecticut, Iowa, Minnesota and New Hampshire. Those are the states where we have collected samples to date.

And I repeat Arizona, California, Connecticut, Iowa, Minnesota and New Hampshire. There have been no positive results for melamine on any of these samples collected so far.

Of those 63, 37 of them were negative, 23 are pending, and 3 could not be analyzed because there was no method to do that, and that was because essentially they were a mixture of rawhide dog chews, clearly of low risk, and gel capsules. So that's why there wasn't a method for those three samples.

That in essence completes my brief summary.

Thank you.

I'll hand it back to Mike Herndon.

Michael Herndon: Thank you, Dr. Acheson.

Now I'd like to turn to Ms. Vera Adams.

Vera Adams: Good afternoon, everyone. During one of the earlier media calls I discussed CBP's efforts to assess if further contaminated gluten products had entered the US.

As a precautionary measure and to supplement federal efforts to detect and prevent the importation of specific products contaminated with melamine, CBP has undertaken sampling and testing of all imported wheat and corn gluten as well as rice protein concentrates arriving from all countries destined for human or animal consumption.

CBP began sampling shipments from China on April 30. On May 2, CBP expanded the scope of the operation to all countries. As part of the operation, CBP undertook sampling of the aforementioned group of products from each shipper as it entered the US.

CBP's laboratories have been analyzing the samples for evidence of melamine and its analogs.

I'd like to give you an update of this effort to date.

Since the beginning of the operation, samples representing about 80% of all shippers of these products have been taken. CBP lab analysis is complete on about 80% of these samples.

And to date, all have shown no findings for melamine or melamine analogs. We will report our complete findings once all the testing and sampling is complete.

And as a result of the large percentage of shippers already tested with negative results, CBP in consultation with FDA is evaluating the operation to determine if the sampling process can be amended and converted to some sort of random sampling protocol.

CBP has undertaken this effort to assure the American public that every effort has and will be made to safeguard public health and safety.

CBP will continue to work closely with FDA to determine the appropriate sampling and testing going forward.

Thank you very much.

Michael Herndon: Thank you, Ms. Adams.

At this time, ladies and gentlemen, we will take your questions. And as always, please limit yourselves to one question and one follow-up, and please state your name and affiliation.

(Rose), we'll take the first call.

Coordinator: Thank you.

At this time if you'd like to ask a question, press star followed by 1 on your touchtone phone. Please unmute your phone and record your name clearly when prompted. Your name is required to introduce your question.

To withdraw your question, you may press star-2.

One moment for our first question.

And our first question is from Dietra Henderson, Boston Globe.

Your line is open.

Dietra Henderson: Thanks a lot for doing this call.

I was curious what you make of the Chinese government's statement earlier this week that they don't think that the US should take stringent action against any exporters of the wheat gluten and rice protein concentrate apart from the suppliers who have already been implicated with the melamine?

The statement is that, "We hope the Americans will accurately and objectively deal with problems among individual companies and not take stringent measures against other Chinese companies producing the same type of products."

David Acheson: This is David Acheson from FDA, let me respond to that.

With regard to our import alert, the import alert, I really want to provide a bit of historical background as to where this came from.

Clearly this began with a problem with wheat gluten and melamine and melamine compounds. It then expanded to rice protein concentrate.

Historically there have been reports in other parts of the world with corn gluten contaminated with melamine. Based on that, the agency felt that it was important to put this import alert focused on vegetable protein concentrates from China.

We still clearly believe that is the right action. You've heard the update on that. We will continue to do that until we are satisfied that the problem is taken care of.



And essentially that's where we're headed because our primary mission here is to safeguard public health in the United States.

Michael Herndon: Dietra, did you have a follow-up?

Dietra Henderson: Just a housekeeping.

When you say these various fish and proteins have tested negative for melamine, is that at the threshold of the testing assay, or are they clearly negative? I guess what I'm saying is, are there traces of melamine that your tests aren't picking up?

David Acheson: Well, a test is only as good as the lower limit of detection of the test. So if you've got a test that's sensitive down to a certain level, and if it's below that level it's going to come up negative in the test, but that's true of any test, it doesn't matter what test you're running. And it is below the limit of detection using our most sensitive methodology.

Michael Herndon: Thank you Dr. Acheson.

Dietra Henderson: Thank you very much.

Michael Herndon: Thank you.

Next question, please?

Coordinator: And our next question comes from Cristy Keith, Universal Press Syndicate.

Your line is open.

Cristy Keith: Hi, thank you.

Yes, this is Cristy Keith from Universal Press Syndicate Pet Connection.

You have stated previously that the FDA was actually sampling and testing pet foods being imported from China. Can you update us on that, how many samples have been tested, and have any of them been positive, and is that sampling still being conducted?

David Acheson: This is David Acheson.

I'm not aware of exactly how many of those we've tested. I certainly am not aware that any have come up positive. If there were, we'd have made that public. So that I can assure you.

But in terms of just how many exactly we tested, I don't know the specific answer to that.

Cristy Keith: And is it still ongoing?

David Acheson: Yes.

Cristy Keith: Okay. Thank you.

Michael Herndon: Next question, please.

Coordinator: The next question is from Julie Schmitt, USA Today.

Your line is open.

Julie Schmitt: Thank you very much.

To the - is Customs sampling the shipments that the FDA is detaining?

David Acheson: I'd refer that question to Customs and Border Protection.

Vera Adams: We are targeting using our own systems and identification of the products that are within the scope of this operation.

Julie Schmitt: Okay. There's - I think this probably is a message or a question for maybe Michael if he's there. Who is the importer of the product that was recalled by cereal byproducts?

Michael Rogers: I don't know that we're prepared to announce that. I think the headline we've said in the past is that most importantly all the positive samples for wheat gluten and rice protein concentrate have all linked back to two suspect sources in China. Those were the two suspect sources that were the target of our visit to China as well as working with AQSIQ.

At this point I don't know what value it would be to walk you through the trace-forward information. But maybe that's something we would provide at a later date.

Michael Herndon: Thank you, Michael.

Next question, please?

Coordinator: The next question is from Nancy Cortis, CBS News.

Your line is open.

Nancy Cortis: Hi, there.

I'm sorry, I didn't understand the answers to the last question about whether Customs is independently testing the product that's been detained.

And I'm also wondering what you mean when you say that they haven't been able to prove that their product is melamine-free. How do they prove that their product doesn't have melamine?

Vera Adams: This is Vera Adams, I'll take the first part of that question.

Both CBP and FDA can target incoming shipments for things that we are interested in detaining and examining and inspecting. So we can put things on hold independently of FDA.

In this particular sampling operation, we are sampling shipments and sending to the labs - having them to our labs, having them examined, and then we are reporting those results to FDA.

David, if you want to comment when FDA is satisfied and has reviewed those results, they will also list the detention they may have also placed on those shipments.

David Acheson: Right. Yeah this is David Acheson just to add or to answer to the second half of your question.

Those shipments are going to remain on detention until FDA is provided with an analytical report from an independent third party lab. And that report needs to demonstrate that the product is free of melamine and associated

compounds, and the testing that Customs and Border Protection are doing on those would fulfill that obviously.

If the shippers decide to use some other independent lab, which they are perfectly entitled to do, we would certainly require that those results be validated and we will review the analytical report, and we may if we've got doubts go ahead and collect a sample of our own to test it for ourselves.

Nancy Cortis: And can you just remind me how many shipments are still being detained, and are there any shipments that were detained but had since been released?

David Acheson: On the import alert, a total of 46 shipments have been detained, and none of those have been released yet but with regard to the FDA import alert.

Now it's different with the assignment that Border Protection is doing, and you've heard the numbers there in terms of what's been tested and what's been released.

Michael Herndon: Thank you.

Next question, please?

Coordinator: The next is from Abigail Goldman, NY Times.

Your line is open.

Abigail Goldman: Thank you.

I'm also - I have a question about the import alert. Those 46 that had been detained, Dr. Acheson, of how many shipments that you have looked at - that's 46 of how many is the first question.

And are they also tested just for melamine? Because it's my understanding there really isn't a good way to test for those other byproducts.

David Acheson: It's about 46 of 46.

The import alert is set up so that any import that's coming in as vegetable protein concentrate from China is detained, so that is - that's 46 of 46.

Abigail Goldman: So there are - I'm sorry - so there are no vegetable imports that has - since this import alert has been put in place there are no vegetable imports from China that have been allowed in this country?

David Acheson: There's no vegetable protein concentrate from China. That's the - it's not vegetable imports.

Abigail Goldman: I'm sorry.

Thank you.

David Acheson: It's vegetable protein concentrate from China. It's specific.

And then you asked me what else we're testing for. We're testing for melamine and melamine related compounds in that.

Abigail Goldman: And cyanuric acid?

David Acheson: Yes, that is a melamine-related compound, yes.

Michael Herndon: Okay, thank you.

Next question, please?

Coordinator: The next is from Steve Dale, Tribune Media Services, WGN.

Your line is open.

Steve Dale: Thank you very much.

I don't have the timeline in front of me, but it took several weeks for investigators to even begin working in China.

You've said differently here, but according to public officials -- and if you'd like I can quote who I spoke to and what they said -- there was difficulty in getting visas apparently. There's a story of someone retiring actually and having difficulty then getting beyond that.

We get to China and then there's a holiday that apparently occurred, and then everything is cleared out of those two facilities.

My colleagues have written about other facilities typically using melamine in China as well. How assured can we be that really there aren't others that at some point might be involved?

I guess what I'm asking, I'm asking two questions in one here and that is, how helpful have the Chinese really, really been based on the fact that it really has

taken a while to get the answers, and the answers aren't answers because there's nothing there.

And how assured can we be that, especially for pet products because I'm interested in pet food at the moment for what I do, that at some point people can look for vegetable proteins and feel assured that it might be safe if it is imported.

I'm sorry for the lengthy question.

David Acheson: No - I mean, that's a good question.

With regard to the times to get - it took to get our investigators in China, obviously there's always a desire to do it like yesterday, and it clearly is not logistically simple to get an investigator to travel from San Francisco to Seattle as it is to get an investigator into China.

There are certain protocols that have to be met, and certainly from discussions with our Office of International Programs, that went about as fast as it could have, and it's always easy to ask the fact - to say, well why did it take so long, and clearly we desire to make it as fast as possible, but typical of these investigations, I don't think it was any slower than normal.

With regard to the (unintelligible) of the second part, is could this be going on in other manufacturers and other areas of China it certainly could be going on there, and that's one of the reasons why we have an import alert currently running so that any vegetable protein concentrate coming in from China is not going to be imported until we have assurance that it's negative.



And we're doing the same thing as we've talked about before with pet food and animal feed except that's not actually an import alert. That's just a sampling strategy.

It's a little different, it means that we do the testing, and clearly if we were to find anything there that could potentially turn into an import alert. But so far we haven't.

So, you know, I think your concerns are reasonable and that's why we're doing what we're doing at the Border to try to make sure that it doesn't happen.

But then in the longer term which is obviously where this leads to, is what do we need to set up with the Chinese authorities to get some assurances that this isn't going to continue into the future, and how do we work with them to get there?

And that's part of the ongoing discussions right now.

Steve Dale: And I guess my follow-up to that, and you lead me right to it is, where are you with those discussions? And can you offer us any of the specifics?

David Acheson: At this point they're - as we've talked about on previous calls, there's been exchange of letters in terms of an MOU suggestion. That is currently in negotiation with China. And I really can't give you any more specifics beyond that.

Michael Herndon: Okay. Thank you, Dr. Acheson.

Next question, please?

Coordinator: David Brown, Washington Post, your line is open.

David Brown: Hi. Thanks for taking this.

I haven't been on all the calls, so I'm perhaps a little bit more confused than some others. But Dr. Acheson, the 46 shipments, you say that they've all come from China, none have proved melamine-free. How many of them - does that mean they've all been found to contain melamine?

That's one question.

And, how many suppliers or manufacturers produced these 46 shipments I guess is another question.

And a related question is, is the Customs and Border Patrol, you know, they've collected (60) -- well, whatever it was -- well their samples I don't have the numbers right here, but none of them contained melamine or can we deduce that those are from places other than China?

David Acheson: You've asked a lot of questions there.

Let me try and clarify for you.

First of all, the 46 shipments that we have detained as part of the import alert - and again to reiterate, the import alert is designed to detain vegetable protein concentrates from China.

It's that unique group, it's not from any other country, it's not other foods from China, it's vegetable protein concentrate. And we have - we are only

aware of 46 that have come into the country since this was set up, and all 46 have been detained.

In order for that to move forward, that has - we have to receive information saying that they are negative for melamine. That is an analysis that is not done by FDA necessarily. We can't analyze it if we're not satisfied with the results that we get or we have some concerns about the results in some way.

And as of now, none of those 46 have moved on. They are all either presumably in some stage of being analyzed. There may have been some paperwork submitted to FDA that I'm not actually aware of the status of that. But what I can tell you is so far 46 in, and none have moved on, pending the results of the analysis.

I think you probably asked some other questions around that.

David Brown: Okay, well...

((Crosstalk))

David Acheson: You know, you asked me whether any are positive. And the answer is - we'll the answer is we don't know because we haven't seen the data. So I don't know whether they're positive or negative.

Michael Herndon: And what is your follow-up question, sir?

David Brown: Okay. Well, the samples that the Customs and Border Patrol is testing, what countries do they come from and...

Vera Adams: It's Customs and Border Protection, sir. But in any case - so, we are sampling - taking representative samples of shippers from all countries and limited to wheat and corn gluten and rice protein concentrates.

Michael Herndon: Thank you, sir.

That was Ms. Vera Adams.

Next question, please?

Coordinator: Greg Presto, Market Watch, your line is open.

(Greg Presto): Hi. Thanks for taking my call today.

One of the things I'm wondering about is, you know, you have - you said earlier, Dr. Acheson, that it may be going on in other places in China. What if fish are being fed this stuff in China over a long period of time?

I mean, we import \$2 billion worth of fish from China every year. What if that stuff is coming here? Is there any effort maybe to test some of the products that may be fed this stuff in China that we're getting?

David Acheson: Yeah. I mean, that's a good question. And we have - as you know we do now have a mechanism to test fish for melamine. That was what we did with the commercial operation, and that testing program of imported Chinese fish is getting underway and some of that testing is happening as we speak.

(Greg Presto): But there's not an import alert on it, correct?

David Acheson: Not - that's correct. There is not an import alert on fish.

(Greg Presto): And my second question then would be -- I'm sorry -- is there going to be any effort made to augment the human health risk assessment to include rather than just saying, okay more chemical I suppose but the interaction between melamine and cyanuric acid rather than just saying them as two liquids but how they might come together as a solid?

David Acheson: The way that's been dealt with by the risk assessors is to do what's called an additive interaction as opposed to a synergistic one, and I hope I'm not confusing you by what I say there, is that if there's melamine in there and cyanuric acid in there, then you add the two together.

I don't believe the risk assessment has actually taken into account a synergism. And there's a difference. And I think that's based on the fact that the various federal scientists who have been working on this haven't been able to demonstrate that there's scientific evidence, that there is true synergism.

And what I'm talking about there is, if you've got one part melamine and one part cyanuric acid, you basically have two parts of the problem.

If you - that's additive.

If you've got one part melamine and one part cyanuric acid and they are synergistic, you may have a threefold or a fourfold problem.

Hopefully I haven't confused you with that, but there is no indication in the scientific literature that our scientists are aware of that these compounds are actually synergistic. Additive, yes, but synergistic, no.

Michael Herndon: Thank you.

Next question, please?

Coordinator: Steve Hirsch, Washington Times.

Your line is open.

Steve Hirsch: This is Steve Hirsch from the Washington Times.

The Chinese said yesterday that US authorities are satisfied following their inspection of the two companies. Is that true?

David Acheson: The investigators as you know have returned. They are writing their report. I have not seen that report yet.

As we told you when they visited those two companies they were locked up, cleaned out, that's not - that's news that's old.

I haven't seen the report in terms of who is satisfied with what.

Clearly from FDA's perspective we are continuing the import alert, we're continuing to look for potential melamine, melamine type compounds in vegetable protein concentrate, so we are going to continue to do that until we are satisfied that this is under control.

Steve Hirsch: I'm not sure I understood. So is the Chinese statement accurate or inaccurate?

David Acheson: Which - repeat the statement to me.

Steve Hirsch: Chinese say the US authorities are satisfied. I'm looking at AP story from yesterday. "China says checks on food exporters have turned up no sign of a chemical blamed for the deaths," blah, blah, blah, blah, and then later on says that "FDA inspectors expressed satisfaction with the quality controls and tracing measures in place at the other company," that SinoGlory.

David Acheson: Well, I don't know where that statement came from, but clearly our continued import alert would indicate that we have continuing concerns with imports of vegetable protein concentrates from China.

Steve Hirsch: Let me follow up.

You talked before about how long it took to get the inspectors over there. I'm not clear on why it would take so long, but is there any - how long did it take between the time you decided to send these guys over and the time they actually got there? And do you have any guarantee that Chinese authorities did not take corrective or concealing action during that delay period?

David Acheson: Michael Rogers is going to try to give you - try to give you some more specifics on some of those issues.

Michael Rogers: We can't comment on - we don't know what happened before we got there. But one of the previous questions, and it relates to yours is, to get a better understanding of the time it takes to actually do a foreign inspection or actually get there.

One of the things you should understand is that we don't have the same authorities in the foreign arena that we do in the domestic. Technically an inspection in China would require that the firm allow us to come in as well as

an invitation by the government. We went through those administrative processes.

That's different than the jurisdiction we traditionally have in the domestic arena.

These products aren't technically under our jurisdiction from foreign sources until they hit the border. So that kind of explains to a degree some of the challenges and the associated time issues associated with us getting into China.

Now with respect to what we were able to accomplish, we did in fact meet with China's General Administration for Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine, AQSIQ, and through those discussions we were able to confirm that both suspect sources in China were in fact no longer manufacturing product. That was a positive outcome.

We also engaged with AQSIQ on subsequent assurances that we'll be having further dialog going on about some of the things they will be - some of the activities they'll be engaging in to ensure the quality of product coming out of China.

However, that doesn't negate our proactive efforts of what we are doing at the border as far as - as well as part of our assignment.

Michael Herndon: Thank you, Michael.

Next question, please?

Coordinator: (Karen Robach), Pittsburgh Tribune Review, your line is open.



(Karen Robach): Hi. Thank you for taking my call.

I was wondering if you could quantify the combined quantity of the 46 shipments, perhaps in tonnage. And also I was wondering that - what percentage of vegetable protein concentrates are grown in this country and what percentage do we import?

David Acheson: This is David Acheson. I don't think you're going to like any of my answers.

I don't think I've got any answers for you on the specifics.

I don't know the volume of the shipments in terms of tonnage.

And in terms of the proportion that's - the vegetable protein concentrates, the US grown versus imported, again I don't have those numbers in front of me.

But we may be able to dig some of those out potentially given enough time, but I can't tell you right off the top of my head.

(Karen Robach): Does that mean I get two more questions?

Michael Herndon: No.

Man: One

Michael Herndon: One more.

(Karen Robach): Any update on the fifth contaminate?

David Acheson: On the what?

(Karen Robach): The - you were looking for possibly a fifth contaminate. Any update on that?

David Acheson: A fifth?

Michael Herndon: (Contaminate) - yeah.

David Acheson: I don't quite know what you are alluding to though.

(Karen Robach): In the teleconference the other day there was discussion of a redacted document.

David Acheson: Oh, oh, oh, oh, right. Okay. I'm sorry.

Yes, that was - essentially that fifth contaminant was a screen that we utilize. It's just sort of a - it's a chemical screen that we use that looks for a whole range of things, and it's a screen that's a standard screen that we developed.

As I say, it covers a range of chemicals that go well beyond melamine. And the reason that it was redacted is essentially because of the sensitive nature of what those are, and we certainly don't want to telegraph to the world what it is that we look for. So that's what that fifth item was.

Michael Herndon: Thank you, Dr. Acheson.

Next question, please?

Coordinator: (Don Rockoff), Baltimore Sun. Your line is open.

(Don Rockoff): Thanks. I just want to clarify two things.

First of all, Dr. Acheson, the fish in the hatcheries, the tiny fish, they are still being held there, is that right?

David Acheson: Yes, they are still there.

(Don Rockoff): Okay.

And second, Ms. Adams, you talked about CBP is considering a change to random sampling. So if you weren't doing random sampling before, what were you doing?

Vera Adams: What we were doing was targeting several shipments from each shipper as they entered the United States and taking a couple of samples from those shipments. So it was more of a deliberate target versus a statistically random type of sample.

And while we may continue to do very intensive review of, say, the China stuff in conjunction with FDA, some of the all other countries may revert to something a little more statistically randomly generated, via our automated systems. But that is still under discussion at this point, and we will be talking about this with FDA over the next week or two.

(Don Rockoff): Thank you.

Vera Adams: Uh-huh.

Michael Herndon: Thank you.

Next question, please?

Coordinator: Anna Edney, Congress Daily.

You line is open.

Anna Edney: Thank you.

Dr. Acheson, I'm wondering, you were talking about some talks with China, and I know you can't tell us specifics, but can you say, you know, how - maybe if there's examples of working with other countries after they have been scares like this or any agreements going on with other countries right now that could end up being similar to what comes out of this?

David Acheson: Well, let me give you an example that comes to mind, and that would be how we've worked with the Mexican government and the Mexican authorities on cantaloupes.

Several years ago we had some concerns and problems with imported cantaloupe from Mexico with salmonella contamination. What we did there was to give them technical advice and assistance on good agricultural practices on what could be done on the farms to minimize the likelihood of a contamination.

And that involved some site visits, interactions with the Mexican authorities, farmers, et cetera, to help them produce a safer product.

And it worked. They put a lot of things in place and they produced a safer product.

We did - at FDA, continue to test imported cantaloupes periodically, and in fact last December noticed a blip - a problem with salmonella again and then went back to Mexico and worked with them some more to try to iron out that problem. So that's an example of how we've worked with other countries to direct a specific problem.

Michael Herndon: Did you have a follow-up?

Anna Edney: Yes. Thank you for that example.

And I just wonder, do you have any idea when you might be wrapping up talks with China? I hear there is supposedly a visit maybe next week of the Chinese officials coming here?

David Acheson: Did you say wrapping up talks to China?

Anna Edney: Yes.

David Acheson: No, I don't know.

Clearly they're ongoing and I couldn't speak as to how quickly they will reach a fruitful endpoint. I don't know.

Michael Herndon: Okay.

Thank you, Dr. Acheson.

Next question, please?

Coordinator: Emily Brown, Bloomberg News.

Your line is open.

Emily Brown: Hi. Thank you for taking my question.

I wanted to know how long do you plan on testing these products? I mean, when does this end, or does it just keep on? Does it continue or is there a deadline that you're trying to reach?

David Acheson: Well, let me - this is David Acheson of FDA. Let me speak for the FDA side of this and then you can hear on the Customs and Border Protection piece from Vera.

With regard to our import alert, and again its Chinese vegetable protein concentrates that we're focused on, we've talked already about what it takes to release a detained shipment.

The import alert document explains what needs to be done by an importer to get off this import alert. It's laid out in that document as to what they have to do to essentially be absolved of having to go through the import alert requirements.

And what I'd suggest you do is look at that because there are various criteria - - it's fairly lengthy -- and that will give you the specifics of what they would need to do. And that's essentially a point at which it would end.

Emily Brown: Okay. I just have one more question.

Could you just go back and talk about the dog food? I just didn't get all the details with that, that you were testing it.

David Acheson: Do you mean - I haven't said anything about dog food today.

Emily Brown: Okay, I thought I heard dog chews earlier.

David Acheson: Oh, I did mention dog chews.

Emily Brown: Okay.

David Acheson: All right. Sorry.

Emily Brown: That's okay.

David Acheson: In our domestic, what we call protein surveillance assignment, this is when our investigators with the state colleagues are going out to domestic manufacturers who use vegetable protein concentrate, we collect samples and we raise awareness about the importance of knowing your suppliers.

We've collected 63 samples as part of that assignment, 37 of them are negative, 23 are still pending in the labs, and 3 of them couldn't be analyzed. And this is where the dog part comes in.

And one of the reasons they couldn't be analyzed is because they were a mixture of raw dog chews, rawhide dog chews -- so not something that would contain melamine -- and gel capsules. So they weren't really things we were targeting specifically anyway. That was the reference to dogs.

Emily Brown: And then what states were you compiling that - those samples from?

David Acheson: So far those 63 samples have come from Arizona, California, Connecticut, Iowa, Minnesota and New Hampshire. But that assignment is continuing. It's not over.

Emily Brown: Okay.

Michael Herndon: Okay.

Emily Brown: Thank you.

Michael Herndon: All right. Next question, please?

Coordinator: Richard Knox, National Public Radio.

Your line is open.

Richard Knox: Yes, thanks very much.

Is FDA conducting a review of other potential economic adulterants? That is, what other food ingredients might be targeted - targets for additives for economic reasons?

David Acheson: This is David Acheson of FDA. That's a really good question, and I think soon as this situation arose one of the questions that we started to ask was that exact one, as to what other ingredients or products should we be thinking of that may be subject to a deliberate act that could harm public health in the United States.

As we've talked about before, our testing inspectional strategies are based on risk and using the conventional way of thinking that a food ingredient like



melamine would - not melamine - like wheat gluten - a food ingredient like wheat gluten wouldn't ordinarily be considered high risk.

But this situation has made us think of this in a slightly different direction. And I know part of the activity of our friends in Food Safety and Applied Nutrition is currently looking at is what other ingredients might be broadly used that we import a lot of that we might need to think about.

So that's definitely something that we've thought of and are looking into it.

Richard Knox: How do you begin that process of assessing it?

David Acheson: Looking at what's imported in terms of lines of shipments coming in of different ingredients and that sort of thing and, you know, linking it with food processing type expertise and just asking the question, what's a widely used ingredient that we import a lot of? Looking at it from that perspective.

Richard Knox: Thank you.

Michael Herndon: Thank you.

Thank you, Dr. Acheson.

Next question, please?

Coordinator: Bob Burgdorfer, Reuters.

Your line is open.

Bob Burgdorfer: Hi. Thank you for taking my call.

Regarding those 46 shipments, can you kind of walk me through how the testing is done? I mean, is this the - protein in bulk, in bags? How much sampling is per shipment?

I know you said you didn't get into the tonnage, but I'm assuming these are fairly large amounts. And if you could walk that through for me please I'd appreciate it.

David Acheson: Well, there us no specific strategy that FDA is going to prescribe. What the company has to do is determine through their own expertise or third party expertise is what's a reasonable sampling strategy -- do it, test it, make sure the test is satisfactory, and then present us with the information.

And if we're not comfortable with what they've done, we're going to say no.

And it's going to vary because, as I said, I don't have details of the shipments. But it may vary depending whether it's a large shipment or a small one.

Michael Herndon: Did you have a follow-up, sir?

Bob Burgdorfer: Yes. Like how many tests per shipment per load, and again is this protein in bulk, in bags?

David Acheson: It can come in in all kinds of forms, and the numbers of samples per shipment is - that's going to be determined on the size of the shipment, and it's something that the company importing the product, the importer, is going to have to figure out.

We're not going to tell them if it's a bag of X sizes you need to take Y number of samples. They need to do that and present us with the analytical results of that.

Michael Herndon: Thank you, Dr. Acheson.

Operator, we have time for one more question.

Coordinator: (Susan Sanoff), CNN.

Your line is open.

(Susan Senneff): Yes, thank you so very much for taking your - my question, and I have I think for Dr. Acheson two questions.

The first may be my ignorance, but I'm puzzled that apparently you can test for melamine related compounds including cyanuric acid in fish flesh but not in pork flesh -- muscle maybe -- or chicken flesh. And are there technical reasons for this or would this reflect the different types of scrap that was in the different feeds, or just what is the working hypothesis?

David Acheson: The assays that we have are testing initially the feed and the raw ingredients -- that the wheat gluten and rice protein concentrate -- which is - we've discussed before. Not to confuse you even further were in fact more akin to wheat flour that was a mix of wheat gluten and melamine. But I've gone off on a tangent.

We developed assays to measure melamine, cyanuric acid and two other related compounds -- one called ammeline and the other called ammelide. So that's essentially four different chemicals, all related to melamine.

The parent compound is melamine. Melamine breaks down to these other things -- cyanuric acid, ammeline and ammelide. We were able to develop assays to measure the levels of all four of those in certain ingredients and in pet food and animal feed.

What the lab folk have been trying to do is to create the system to be able to measure all four in muscle tissue, and technically it's been much more of a challenge to measure it in tissue than it has been in the feed.

Where they are at this point is they've been able to develop assays to measure the melamine itself, and that's it, in the fish and in the hogs.

The - they are working on trying to develop the cyanuric acid part of the assay so they can measure both of those things in fish and hogs. That's not quite there yet, and it is purely a technical issue to do with the complexity of the matrix you're working with, working with muscle and fat in a tissue sample is much more difficult than working with a matrix like wheat gluten or wheat flour with melamine. It's the - it's really of a technical factor.

Does that make sense to you?

(Susan Senneff): Yes, indeed.

Now my second question must not be considered to be heretical, but I'm rather wondering whether the - Dr. Acheson, whether you could use the other half of the FDA because the pharmaceutical companies of course have enormous expertise in preclinical testing of - for animal toxicology and when they are working on their GMP, their good manufacturing practices and all.

And as you probably know, in many, many instances the pharmaceutical companies have better equipment certainly than many universities, longer columns for the GC and all that sort of thing.

So, is there any possibility that your outreach includes larger labs in dealing with these complicated problems about muscle and fat in these various animals?

David Acheson: Well - I mean, that's a good question and I know our National Center for Toxicological Research and essentially the group that deals with assays across the board are part of this.

This is not just a foods group. And I - that expertise, the expertise developing this is a crosscutting group within the agency. It's not just a foods team that's doing it.

One of the difficulties of getting at these issues is handling food matrixes. They are just typically spectacularly difficult to work with, and I certainly have a lot of faith that our team has been looking in every direction to try and get help and support and suggestions as to how to solve the problem as quickly as possible. But certainly it's something that we can follow up on, and I will pass that suggestion on just in case they haven't thought of it. But I would anticipate that they have.

Michael Herndon: Thank you.

Thank you, Dr. Acheson.

Ladies and gentlemen that concludes today's media teleconference. Thank you for your participation.

The replay will be available in about an hour, and will be available for about three days. If you have follow-up questions, please don't hesitate to call the respective agencies.

Thanks, and have a great rest of the today.

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