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DIALOG(R)File 704:(Portland)The Oregonian  
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09234250

**MEAT PROCESSOR SHUT AFTER BURGER RECALL**

Oregonian (PO) - Friday, August 22, 1997

By: RICK WEISS and CAROLINE MAYER - LA Times - Washington Post Services

Edition: SUNRISE Section: WIRE STORIES Page: A01

Word Count: 998

**MEMO:**

TYPE: National Oregon

IN

**TEXT:**

WASHINGTON - Summary: Hudson Foods Inc. closes a Nebraska plant after some products are found with E. coli

A major meat-processing company already under federal investigation for its recent distribution of tainted hamburgers agreed to the largest meat recall in U.S. history Thursday.

The firm, Hudson Foods, Inc., is shutting down its Nebraska beef-processing facility indefinitely and recalling all burgers shipped from the plant, estimated to be about 25 million pounds, Agriculture Department and company officials announced.

The enormous nationwide recall was a nonnegotiable" recommendation from the government, Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said.

It was put to Hudson Foods of Rogers, Ark., after federal inspectors uncovered evidence that the company's meat processing, bacterial testing and bookkeeping procedures were inadequate to assure that its products were safe.

Enough new information has come to light so we are ready to take action," Glickman said at a hastily called news conference.

The move expands on a 1.2 million-pound hamburger recall at the same plant, announced last Friday. That recall was ordered after federal investigators determined that Hudson hamburgers produced during three days in June had caused 16 cases of food poisoning in Colorado.

In a statement released Thursday, Hudson Foods said it was closing the plant and initiating the recall out of an abundance of caution and to restore the public confidence."

Undersecretary for Food Safety Cathie Woteki urged consumers to check their freezers for any Hudson Foods frozen hamburgers and return them to the place of purchase.

All Hudson products are labeled with an establishment number," which is 13569.

The USDA said that consumers should assume that some of the meat was shipped to all 48 contiguous states.

However, Dr. Fred Hoesly, an epidemiologist for the Oregon Health Division, said he didn't believe any tainted product had been shipped to Oregon. He said state officials had been monitoring E.coli cases and none had been associated with Hudson hamburger.

The company's burgers are carried by such national chains as Burger King, Wal-Mart, Boston Market, Sam's Club and Safeway.

Burger King announced it would immediately pull all Hudson products from its restaurants.

About 25 percent of Burger King outlets carry Hudson beef products, and some of those restaurants may experience temporary shortages of burgers, the company said in a statement.

Boston Market ordered Hudson patties pulled from all of its 1,200 stores.

The patties will be out of our stores within the next 15 minutes," said Jeff Beckman, Boston Market's public-relations director, just an hour after the 2:30 news conference.

Beckman said 40 percent of its stores used Hudson beef from the Columbus, Neb., plant to make meatloaf. For a time, meatloaf will not be available at the affected eateries.

Officials at the Defense Commissary Agency, which supplies the 300 military commissaries around the world issued a notice ordering the offending Hudson beef products" be removed from sale.

We're concerned about this matter, but so far we've had no reports of any illness resulting from consumption of Hudson beef patties," said Herb Greene, public-affairs specialist for the commissary agency.

A Safeway spokeswoman in Oakland, Calif., said only one division in the entire country -- the Denver stores -- did business with Hudson Foods. That division removed all of the company's beef from its stores the morning of Aug. 12, the day the first recall was announced.

Glickman said the department was moved to recommend closure of Hudson's Columbus, Neb., plant and a total recall after inspectors learned how the company used leftover meat.

Raw meat not used in the burger-making operation on one day was added to batches of raw meat used to make burgers the next day. That method makes it increasingly difficult with each day to keep track of whether any leftovers from a contaminated batch have made their way into subsequent batches.

The problem was exacerbated by inadequate bookkeeping methods for tracking the fate of various lots of beef, said Thomas J. Billy, administrator of the department's Food Safety and Inspection Service, which is directing the food-safety arm of the Hudson investigation.

Billy said the agency also was concerned that the company's testing for bacterial contamination has been inadequate.

A separate investigation for possible criminal activity still is under way, said USDA Inspector General Roger Viadero.

That investigation was initiated after a USDA audit last week determined the company's initial estimate of the amount of meat that may have been contaminated in June was short by more than a million pounds.

Billy said the department was now fairly certain the contamination, caused by a potentially deadly bacterium called E. coli O157:H7, originated in raw meat provided to Hudson from one of seven suppliers.

When the culprit supplier is identified definitively, he said, investigators will follow up to see if that company also shipped contaminated products to other processing facilities.

That investigation could lead to additional recalls, officials said.

Hudson stressed that the recall does not affect its poultry products, which account for about 93 percent of the company's \$1.4 billion annual revenue.

Agriculture officials said they planned to look at Hudson's poultry operations after completing their investigation of the company's beef-processing plant.

Billy said the beef plant would not reopen until the company presents the USDA with an acceptable plan for testing its raw meat and revamps its record-keeping and product-coding system in a way that will allow better tracking of product lots.

The Agriculture Department does not have the authority to force a meat plant to close, a long-standing frustration for Glickman and his predecessors. But it can withdraw its inspectors from a plant.

That would leave that plant's meat products lacking the department's seal of approval -- a potentially ruinous act, the threat of which generally persuades producers to follow the department's recommendations.

Glickman said he would prepare legislation in time for Congress' return that would grant him the authority to order meat and poultry recalls and levy civil fines against companies that threaten the public health.

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DESCRIPTORS: CONTAMINATION; RECALL

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DIALOG(R)File 706:(New Orleans)Times Picayune  
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09236153

**RECALL EXPOSES MURKY FEDERAL RULES BURGER KING DUMPS HUDSON**

New Orleans Times Picayune (NO) - Sunday, August 24, 1997

By: PAM BELLUCK 1997, N.Y. Times News Service

Edition: THIRD Section: NATIONAL Page: A1

Word Count: 1,385

**TEXT:**

**COLUMBUS, NEB.** - One late spring day last year, several trucks rolled away from the Hudson Foods processing plant and out of the cornfields bracketing this city of 20,000 people in the heart of the nation's beef belt. They were loaded with frozen ground beef patties destined to be turned into Whoppers, hamburgers and Whopper Jr.'s at Burger King restaurants around the country.

But after the trucks were well on the road, Hudson Foods officials made a disturbing discovery. The company had shipped the meat without waiting for the results of the bacterial tests that Burger King requires of all its suppliers, said Mark Giresi, senior vice president and general counsel at Burger King.

When the results came back, they showed that some of the beef had been infected with staphylococcus bacteria, which can cause vomiting and diarrhea.

"We made them pull it all back," Giresi said, so the contamination was caught before the meat made it to any Burger King kitchens. Hudson Foods dismissed an employee over the incident and agreed to tighten supervision and shipping procedures.

"Human error was made and the company dealt with it aggressively and strongly," Skip Rutherford, a company spokesman, said Saturday.

But Giresi said Burger King officials were sufficiently alarmed that they did what they had never done to a supplier before or since: they placed Hudson Foods on what they called probation, checking the meat plant's Burger King production with unannounced visits and laboratory tests eight times a month.

After a year, Burger King was satisfied with the plant's performance; in late June, it stopped the special monitoring. Seven weeks later, the Hudson Foods plant became the object of what federal officials called the largest

meat recall in U.S. history, 25 million pounds of ground beef.

Saturday, Giresi said that Burger King would stop buying beef from Hudson Foods, which means the plant is losing its biggest customer.

The trajectory of the relationship between Burger King and the Hudson Foods plant may say as much about the competitive and sensitive nature of the meat industry as it does about the specific quality of production at a single meat processor thrust suddenly into the spotlight.

It is a world in which federal regulations have left much unspecified. Many practices are determined by the dictates of efficiency or the marketplace. So many different steps and companies are involved that the chain from ranch to slaughterhouse to processing plant to customer is far from an easily traceable straight line.

Indeed, inspectors say no matter how sophisticated government testing of meat and poultry becomes, the sheer volume produced in America may make it impossible to detect all dangerous bacteria in food.

"There is probably no way to absolutely foolproof this process," Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said this week.

And health risks in the meat industry can start well before the cattle reach slaughterhouses.

Agriculture experts told U.S. News & World Report that farmers often add waste substances to livestock and poultry feed. Chicken manure, which is cheaper than alfalfa, is increasingly used as feed by cattle farmers despite possible health risks to consumers, says the magazine reaching newsstands Monday.

"Feeding manure that has not been properly processed is supercharging the cattle feces with pathogens likely to cause disease in consumers," Dr. Neal Barnard, head of the Washington-based health lobby, Physicians for Responsible Medicine, told the magazine.

This can make the Agriculture Department meat inspectors' job even harder.

At the Hudson plant in Columbus, Neb., many employees and even federal inspectors say that the plant, one of the most modern in the industry, is clean and generally well run. But federal investigators said that some of the plant's practices were worrying - specifically, poor record-keeping and the mixing of one day's leftover hamburger patties into the next day's.

production.

The giant recall announced last week came after earlier recalls of more than a million pounds of Hudson Foods beef, which were ordered when 17 people in Colorado became ill from eating hamburgers made from the beef. The meat was found to have been infected with E. coli bacteria. The U.S. Department of Agriculture said the meat was contaminated before it reached the Columbus plant, most likely in one of a handful of slaughterhouses.

Burger King dropped Hudson Foods even though the problems federal officials say they found at the plant itself were not found in the separate production line it ran for Burger King, which requires significantly stricter procedures than federal law does.

"We've advised them that we will not be buying any more beef products," Giresi said. He said that Burger King would continue to buy chicken from Hudson Foods, which is produced at other plants.

Rutherford of Hudson Foods said Saturday morning that he was unaware of that move by Burger King. "We believe this is a very good and safe plant," he said. "We've also said that if we can do things better, then we'll certainly be open to doing that. We've listened; we've heard. If there are improvements that need to be made we'll do that."

The plant is in many ways a more advanced and better-maintained operation than many other meat-processing plants, said federal officials and employees who have worked at Hudson and similar companies.

Friday, the day after the plant was temporarily closed and the recall of the 25 million pounds of beef - nearly a fifth of the plant's annual production - was announced, employees were open in their support for the plant.

"I have a freezer full of Hudson meat I get with an employee purchase discount, and I'm not throwing it away," said Jenny Jacobson, 26, who operates a scale used to weigh meatloaf and tubes of meat sold to Boston Markets restaurants. Jacobson and two other employees, leaving the plant after a company meeting, said the sanitary procedures were the most sophisticated and strict they had ever seen.

"We wear hairnets and hard hats over that," Jacobson said. "Men with any facial hair at all wear beard nets. We all have to go through a boot wash when we come in."

Mary Everett, 41, another scale operator, chimed in.

"No nail polish, no jewelry, not even a cough drop on the floor," she

said. "Ear plugs. We're a good-looking bunch, I'll tell you that."

The Hudson Foods plant, with its 230 employees, is not the most significant employer in Columbus. Still, when Hudson Foods Inc., based in Rogers, Ark., opened its only beef plant here 2 1/2 years ago to make frozen patties for Wal-Mart, Sam's Club and other chains, people lined up for jobs, said Dale Collinsworth, executive vice president of the Columbus Area Chamber of Commerce. The pay was average, but the plant was modern and mechanized, and the temperature inside was always comfortably cool for the meat.

"It's the kind of industry we look for," Collinsworth said. "It starts small and grows."

The Hudson Foods plant has had the kind of brushes with regulatory agencies that most meat producers have. In 1996, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration fined the plant \$4,000 for mostly administrative infractions such as inadequate written guidelines for emergency evacuations. (Since 1972, Hudson Foods has been fined \$454,498 by OSHA, more than \$330,000 of that a penalty imposed last month against a poultry processing plant in Noel, Mo.)

In Columbus, Agriculture Department inspectors are at Hudson Foods every morning, as they are at most large plants, to see that the plant complies with federal regulations.

While the Department of Agriculture has approved new regulations that will begin taking effect in January, current guidelines do not prescribe as many tests or procedures as Burger King and some other large chains. Employees said that staff quality-control inspectors sampled beef every hour and tested it at a plant laboratory.

After the recall and temporary shutdown was announced, James Hudson, the company's chairman, said in a statement that the decision was made "out of an abundance of caution to restore the public confidence."

For its part, Columbus is standing solidly behind Hudson Foods.

"I think it's been blown out of proportion," said Rick Kubler, a stock and insurance broker eating lunch at Glur's Tavern, which calls itself the oldest continuously operated tavern west of the Missouri River. "I mean, nobody's died."

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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DIALOG(R)File 707: The Seattle Times  
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09234016

**BIG HAMBURGER RECALL CAUSES SHORTAGES NEBRASKA PLANT CLOSED IN AGREEMENT**

**WITH AGRICULTURE DEPARTMENT**

Seattle Times (SE) - Friday August 22, 1997

By: AP: SEATTLE TIMES STAFF

Edition: FINAL Section: NEWS Page: A6

Word Count: 476

**TEXT:**

Some burger fans couldn't have it their way today after Hudson Foods announced it was shutting a Nebraska plant and recalling 25 million pounds of possibly tainted beef. Burger King said hundreds of restaurants were affected.

Hudson Foods called for the recall and agreed to close the plant yesterday in an agreement with the Agriculture Department, which said more stringent safety standards were needed there even though the beef was contaminated elsewhere.

Burger King said 1,650 restaurants were initially affected - a quarter of its more than 6,000 restaurants - and 700 still were without hamburger today. The others got rush deliveries from other suppliers.

Burger King said the affected restaurants were in 28 states, mostly everywhere except the East and West Coasts, Alaska and Hawaii.

Other major customers of the plant include Safeway, Wal-Mart and Boston Market, officials said.

Representatives for Burger King, Boston Market and Safeway said outlets in the Northwest are not affected because their hamburger is not supplied by Hudson Foods.

A spokeswoman for Safeway in Auburn said there is no chance that stores here would be asked to send hamburger to outlets in other parts of the country that are affected by the shortage.

The recall began after health officials traced the illnesses of more than a dozen people in Colorado to hamburger patties they ate in early June.

E. coli bacteria contamination originated at a slaughterhouse - outside the Hudson plant - but the recall is needed because of problems with meat handling, record keeping and safety testing, Agriculture Department officials said.

The plant will not open until the company has adopted "far more stringent safety standards," Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said.

The recall, which officials called the department's largest, covers all patties made by the plant that are still believed to be in the marketplace.

Twenty-five million pounds of beef translates into 100 million quarter-pound hamburgers.

Glickman said officials discovered the plant had a practice of using leftover raw meat from one day in the next day's production. That makes it difficult to know when the last of the tainted meat left the plant.

Officials are looking at the seven slaughterhouses that were known to have supplied the plant, said Tom Billy, administrator of the Agriculture Department's Food Safety and Inspection Service.

"I'll tell you what - this plant is clean," said Jarod Krueger, a Hudson security worker. "It's just depressing they have to send all these people home."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which investigated the E. coli outbreak associated with the patties in Colorado, said yesterday that 15 people became ill between June 14 and July 14. Five of them were hospitalized.

Eleven said they had eaten frozen patties, and eight specifically remembered eating Hudson Foods patties, the CDC said.

E. coli is a potentially deadly bacteria that often gets into food through contact with fecal matter.

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DIALOG(R)File 708:(Akron)Beacon Journal  
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09234070

**BEEF SUPPLIER RECALLS 25 MILLION POUNDS USDA PRESSURE FORCES  
HUDSON FOODS  
TO CLOSE PLANT LINKED TO SICKNESS**

Beacon Journal (Akron) (AK) - Friday August 22, 1997

By: From Beacon Journal wire services / Beacon Journal staff writers Keith

McKnight and Jane Snow contributed to this report.

Edition: 1 STAR Section: NATION Page: A1

Word Count: 1,193

**MEMO:**

**CORRECTION: CORRECTION / GETTING IT STRAIGHT:** The story below about beef recalls also included information about the U.S. Agriculture Department recalling chicken nuggets and patties from schools in 33 states. Some readers may have been confused, but the story accurately indicated that the chicken was produced by ConAgra Inc. and Tyson Foods Inc.

**TEXT:**

**WASHINGTON** - Hudson Foods Co. yesterday recalled 25 million pounds of ground beef, less than a week after calling back 1.2 million pounds of beef linked to bacterial contamination.

Under intense pressure from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Hudson also agreed yesterday to shut down its plant in Columbus, Neb., and not reopen it until the company erases all the government's doubts that its processes are safe. E. coli O157:H7, a potentially deadly strain of E. coli bacteria, was found in burgers made there in early June.

The company sells products directly to consumers through Safeway supermarkets, Wal-Mart and Sam's Club, as well as to Burger King and Boston Market fast-food stores.

Some restaurants and retailers in the Akron area have been affected by the recall.

At Boston Market in Fairlawn, a manager who would identify himself only as "Bill" said Hudson hamburger had been voluntarily recalled and was still in his store, but would not be served.

At the Cuyahoga Falls store, manager Ruth Ann Casteel said Hudson hamburger was used only in Boston Market's meatloaf, and meatloaf was no longer being served there.

"There's been a voluntary recall and we're sending it back to them, so as of now, we're not serving meatloaf anymore," she said.

Representatives of Burger King, a fast-food chain identified as using Hudson hamburger, could not be reached.

Acme corporate officials were unavailable for comment yesterday, but a spokesman for Acme No. 1 on Akron's West Market Street said that store does not carry any of Hudson's products.

Officials from Giant Eagle, Buehler's and Finast said yesterday that none of their stores sell Hudson's products.

Wal-Mart, a chain mentioned as being affected by the recall, had no comment last night.

Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said he had been prepared to withdraw federal inspectors from the Nebraska plant if Hudson hadn't agreed to the temporary shutdown. Glickman lacks the authority to order the plant closed, but without inspectors it couldn't sell its product because meat and poultry must carry a U.S. Department of Agriculture inspection sticker.

The plant will remain closed until the company has adopted "far more stringent safety standards that we have specifically laid out for them based on what we have found in our investigation," Glickman said.

The recall announced yesterday -- the largest such recall in U.S. history -- covers everything that might still be on the market from the plant.

Because it's in the form of frozen patties, USDA officials believe much of it may still be stored by wholesalers, distributors, grocers and restaurants nationwide.

About 20 people in Colorado were sickened by the potentially deadly E. coli bacteria starting in June. No one has been reported sick since mid-July.

The bacteria cause severe diarrhea, cramps and dehydration.

Three children died in a larger outbreak in the Pacific Northwest in 1993.

Federal food-safety experts were still trying to find the cause of the latest outbreak, which was traced to boxes of 4-ounce beef patties produced at Hudson's Nebraska plant. Officials now believe the beef was contaminated with fecal matter at one of Hudson's supplier slaughterhouses, and the

contamination was spread during the grinding at the hamburger plant.

One of the difficulties, the USDA said, is that Hudson used meat left over from one day's grinding in the next day's work.

Hudson Foods, which has headquarters in Rogers, Ark., is the fifth-largest producer of chicken products and the 12th-largest producer of turkey products in the country.

#### ANOTHER RECALL

Also yesterday, the Agriculture Department announced it is recalling chicken nuggets and patties from schools in 33 states, including Ohio, because they may contain dioxin, which is believed to cause cancer.

But Undersecretary of Agriculture Shirley Watkins said "only 117,000 pounds" of the product was shipped into Ohio, and it was shipped last January.

"I would think that there is very little of the product remaining," she said, noting that it has probably already been consumed.

The chicken was produced by ConAgra Inc. and Tyson Foods Inc., Watkins said, but "it does not represent an immediate health risk or threat."

Watkins said she did not know the identity or the number of Ohio schools involved.

Yesterday's recalls highlighted weaknesses in the nation's meat safety system, which has not been significantly modernized since the 1930s. Though government inspectors look at meat as it passes through slaughterhouses and processing plants, there is no inspection for invisible and potentially dangerous bacteria, such as E. coli.

The quickest test for E. coli takes at least three days to complete, said microbiologist Hans Blaschek of the University of Illinois. By that time, potentially contaminated meat is far away, perhaps on consumers' dinner tables. And once an outbreak is discovered, the government cannot order a recall of tainted meat.

The USDA is phasing in a series of changes in its inspection system that should reduce contamination, but won't make it any easier to see it when it does occur.

A microbial DNA fingerprinting system, which helps health officials

determine if bacterial contamination is coming from one source, is part of a new federal foodborne disease surveillance system being implemented in all 50 states.

In the meantime, the government recommends that consumers cook meat until it registers 160 degrees. At that temperature, all the dangerous microbes are killed.

Checking each burger with a thermometer is the only way to be sure it's safe, the agency said.

"That's not something anybody I know is going to do," Blaschek said. He suggested consumers just use common sense and not worry too much, since E. coli contamination remains relatively rare.

The USDA estimates that E. coli and other food-borne bacteria cause an estimated 4,000 deaths and 5 million illnesses per year.

Scientists discovered E. coli's toxic form in 1982, and the microorganism gained notoriety in a 1993 outbreak that began at a Seattle Jack-in-the-Box, sickening several hundred people and killing three children.

The bacteria produce a toxin that damages the colon, causing painful, bloody diarrhea. In severe cases, it can shut down the kidneys and destroy blood cells. It is rarely fatal, but children and the elderly are at greatest risk.

Consumer groups such as Safe Tables Our Priority (STOP), which was formed by the victims of the 1993 outbreak, say many of these illnesses could be prevented if the government conducted more stringent inspections and tests, and if the USDA had the authority to shut down problem plants and recall suspect meat.

STOP and other consumer groups said they support Glickman's actions. Dale Moore, a spokesman for the National Cattlemen's Association, said his organization does too.

"The safety of the beef supply is pretty important to our industry," he said.

People can call the USDA hot line for information at 1-800-535-4555, or Hudson's hot line at 1-800-447-2670.

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DIALOG(R)File 712:Palm Beach Post  
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09237113

**BEEF UP THE PROTECTION**

Palm Beach Post (PB) - Monday, August 25, 1997

Edition: FINAL Section: OPINION Page: 12A

Word Count: 191

**MEMO:**

TYPE: Editorial

**TEXT:**

The beef isn't all that's spoiled. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has an odor about it, too.

First, it turned out that the USDA doesn't use all its power to protect consumers. The USDA warns buyers when bad meat is sold to individuals through grocery stores. But reporters for Cox Newspapers revealed last week that the USDA doesn't notify the public when meat tainted with bacteria such as E. Coli is delivered to restaurants. Embarrassed, the agency promised last week to change that policy.

Then, as the amount of possibly contaminated beef produced at a Hudson Foods plant in Nebraska reached 25 million pounds, the public discovered that the USDA has no legal authority to order the meat recalled.

The USDA can't be blamed. Previous directors have asked Congress for more authority. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman will do the same. This time, Hudson Foods cooperated with the recall, as did Burger King, Wal-Mart and others who sold the suspect patties. But the USDA ought to have authority beyond a recommendation.

E. Coli's severe flu-like symptoms can be fatal. The same word describes this flaw in consumer protection.

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**DESCRIPTORS: HEALTH; ISSUE; FOOD; SAFETY; US; GOVERNMENT AGENCY;  
RECALL;**

**BUSINESS; RESTAURANT; CONSUMER**

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09233092

**PUBLIC TO BE TOLD IF MEAT RECALLED FROM RESTAURANTS**

Palm Beach Post (PB) - Thursday, August 21, 1997

By: Elliot Jaspin and Scott Montgomery Palm Beach Post-Cox News Service

Edition: FINAL Section: A SECTION Page: 1A

Word Count: 369

**MEMO:**

Ran all editions.

**TEXT:**

WASHINGTON - The U.S. Agriculture Department said Wednesday it will change its policy of not alerting the public when tainted beef and poultry are recalled from restaurants.

Department officials said Wednesday they will begin immediately to post all recalls of contaminated beef and poultry on the Internet and will also send the report to about 200 private organizations on a weekly department mailing list.

The Internet list will be of little use to consumers because they will only show the name of the food supplier, not the restaurants where the recalled food was sent.

Thomas Billy, administrator of the department's Food Safety and Inspection Service, said, however, that the issue of how best to include names of restaurants will be considered in a series of public hearings.

No dates have been set for the public meetings, but Billy said they will be advertised to invite citizen comment.

Billy said the review is being undertaken at the urging of Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman and Undersecretary Catherine Woteki, who manages food safety issues.

Noting that the department relies on the cooperation of the industry because the recall process is voluntary, Billy said the hearings will include industry representatives and government officials, as well as the public.

"We're going to take a fresh look at it," he said.

Tom Amontree, department spokesman, predicted the policy will change.

eating Hudson Foods patties, the center said after investigating the E. coli outbreak in Colorado.

The CDC said the Hudson patties may have been distributed to all 48 contiguous states.

The plant's major customers include Safeway and Burger King, officials said. Both companies said they have stopped sales of beef from Hudson Foods.

"This is clearly the best action to take in the public's interest," Hudson Foods Chairman James Hudson said Thursday, adding that the company was "acting out of an abundance of caution and to restore the public confidence."

CAPTION:

Color: mug of James Hudson

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2/9/85 (Item 1 from file: 725)  
DIALOG(R)File 725:(Cleveland)Plain Dealer  
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09235154

**FAST-FOOD OUTLETS AFFECTED BY RECALL**

Plain Dealer (Cleveland) (PD) - Saturday, August 23, 1997

By: TROY FLINT PLAIN DEALER REPORTER

Edition: FINAL / ALL Section: BUSINESS Page: 1C

Word Count: 796

**TEXT:**

Thursday's decision to dramatically expand the scope of the Hudson Foods recall to 25 million pounds of potentially tainted ground beef has temporarily denied some Cleveland fast-food lovers their favorite treats.

Boston Market, a national restaurant chain with 12 locations in the Cleveland area, agreed to refrain from selling meatloaf in response to government concerns over possible E. coli contamination. In many areas - including Ohio - the meatloaf is made from beef processed at the Columbia, Neb., plant that Hudson officials closed under pressure from the Department of Agriculture.

"The decision to shut down the plant did affect stores in your local area," said Cliff Rankin, marketing director for P&L Food Services in Pittsburgh, which operates Boston Markets in 13 cities, including Cleveland. "Boston Market pulled meatloaf from all of its stores, and there is no questionable meat.

"The USDA believes the only cases of contamination came from eating frozen beef patties, and we do not carry hamburgers or frozen beef patties. But the USDA asked us to remove any meat that came from the [Columbia] plant," Rankin said.

That precaution, prompted by what Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman called "USDA's lack of confidence in the records provided to investigators," also affected the Burger King chain.

The recall has affected 25 percent of Burger King's restaurants nationwide.

Some stores were reduced to selling chicken and fish sandwiches in lieu of the Whopper and other popular beef-based offerings.

In a statement released late yesterday, company officials said only 10

percent of Burger King restaurants suffered a shortage that prevented them from serving customers and predicted that all outlets should be serving beef as normal by noon today.

Calls to more than a dozen local Burger King stores yesterday found no restaurants that said they had trouble. All said they were serving hamburgers as normal.

The recall was not limited to fast-food chains. It also affects shoppers who purchase meat at retail outlets nationwide such as Safeway, which does not have operations in the Cleveland area. Local grocery stores chains Finast and Giant Eagle, the new owner of the Rini-Rego Stop-N-Shop franchise, do not carry Hudson products.

In Ohio, state officials said their inspection agents were beating the bushes to locate any stores that carried the offending meat.

"When our inspectors go out in stores during the course of our regular inspection, they look to make sure stores aren't carrying the [Hudson] products and they distribute information to local health boards," said Andy Ware, spokesman for the Ohio Department of Agriculture. "I've talked to our guys, and they've been out there looking for it [recalled meat], but we don't have any information yet."

National retail giant Wal-Mart, along with its Supercenters and Sam's Club divisions, also receives beef from Hudson. Wal-Mart officials said they took preventive action last week, which spared them from the impact of yesterday's expanded recall.

"We pulled all Hudson meat on Aug. 13, [when the initial recall was made]," said Wal-Mart spokeswoman Betsy Reithemeyer at company headquarters in Bentonville, Ark. "There's nothing else to pull, but we are offering other ground beef."

To guard against the potentially tainted meat, the USDA is asking that consumers check for Hudson Foods-brand frozen, preformed patties with establishment number 13569 printed inside the USDA inspection seal. Agency officials have urged that all packages with this marking be returned to the place of purchase.

The USDA fears that the meat in these packages may be contaminated with the potentially deadly E. coli bacteria that infects food through contact with fecal matter. The bacteria can be eliminated by cooking meat at a temperature of more than 160 degrees Fahrenheit.

An outbreak of E. coli in Colorado caused 15 people to become ill from June 14 to July 14. Five of the victims were hospitalized, and the illnesses are believed to be associated with frozen hamburger patties, which 11 of 15 people questioned remembered eating. Eight of those people specifically remembered eating Hudson Foods frozen hamburger patties, which focused the government's attention on the company.

The USDA's involvement with Hudson Foods began last week when the company agreed to recall 20,000 pounds of meat. Later in the week, the recall was doubled to 40,000 pounds and then increased to 1.2 million pounds last Friday.

Now at 25 million pounds, USDA officials are calling this action the agency's "largest recall ever."

People can call the USDA hotline for information at 1-800-535-4555 or Hudson's hotline at 1-800-447-2670.

Associated Press contributed to this article.

**CAPTION:**

**PHOTO BY ASSOCIATED PRESS** This sign on a drive-through speaker at a Burger King restaurant was how customers in Denver learned that the Hudson Foods hamburger problems meant they could not get a Whooper yesterday.

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2/9/90 (Item 1 from file: 733)  
DIALOG(R)File 733:The Buffalo News  
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09236009

**AMERICANS WANT MORE MONEY SPENT ON FOOD SAFETY, MAGAZINE POLL SHOWS**

Buffalo News (BN) - Sunday, August 24, 1997

By: loomberg News Service

Edition: FINAL Section: NEWS Page: A10

Word Count: 281

**TEXT:**

**NEW YORK** - A majority of Americans, or 62 percent, say the government needs to spend more money to ensure food safety, a Newsweek magazine poll found.

It also found that 51 percent of adults have decided to avoid certain foods or have taken extra precautions in handling and preparing food in the last several days because of recent reports of food contamination.

Two weeks ago, Hudson Foods recalled 1.2 million pounds of ground beef suspected of harboring E. coli bacteria. On Thursday, Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said the company was recalling all meat processed at its Columbus, Neb., plant, and closing the plant indefinitely until problems with its handling of meat produced there are corrected.

E. coli, which can get into meat via cattle fecal matter during the slaughtering and butchering process, can cause serious and potentially fatal stomach problems. It's killed if meat is cooked thoroughly.

Recent reports of contaminated hamburger meat have made 42 percent of those polled less likely to purchase hamburgers at grocery stores. However, only 29 percent are less likely to buy hamburgers at fast-food restaurants, the poll found.

Some of Hudson Foods' customers include fast-food chain operators Grand Metropolitan Plc's Burger King Corp. and Boston Chicken and food stores owned by Wal-Mart Corp. and Safeway. The companies have removed all ground beef they received from Hudson Foods.

The poll also found that 44 percent feel the food supply in the U.S. is less safe than it was 10 years ago, and 38 percent say they are more worried now than a year ago.

The Newsweek poll, conducted Thursday, surveyed 501 adults and has a margin of error of plus or minus five percentage points.

2/9/92 (Item 3 from file: 733)  
DIALOG(R)File 733: The Buffalo News  
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09234119

### FOOD OUTLETS FEEL IMPACT OF BEEF RECALL

Buffalo News (BN) - Friday, August 22, 1997

By: Associated Press

Edition: CITY Section: NEWS Page: A1

Word Count: 655

#### TEXT:

COLUMBUS, NEB. - Burger fans were reduced to chowing down on pork or chicken today after Hudson Foods announced they were shutting a plant and recalling 25 million pounds of possibly tainted beef. Burger King said a quarter of its restaurants were affected.

Hudson Foods called for the recall and closed the plant Thursday in an agreement with the Agriculture Department, which said more stringent safety standards were needed there even though the beef was contaminated elsewhere.

The impact of the massive recall was felt immediately. In a statement today, Burger King said 25 percent of its restaurants were affected. Many Burger Kings were selling chicken and fish sandwiches instead, while some Boston Market restaurants were left without meatloaf.

At a Burger King in Des Moines, Iowa, a sign on the drive-through menu said: "Sorry, only thing available today is chicken, fish, pork products and fries."

"I guess it's a case of it's better to be safe than sorry," Terri Spahn, a customer at a Burger King in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, said late Thursday.

Other major customers of the plant include Safeway and Wal-Mart, officials said.

Employees at the 2-year-old plant in this town 70 miles west of Omaha defended their workplace.

"We're all sticking together, and we're all behind Hudson," said Dan Hull, who makes hamburger patties. More than 200 employees were without jobs, but Hudson said they would continue to receive pay.

The recall began after health officials traced the illnesses of more

than a dozen people in Colorado to hamburger patties they ate in early June.

E. coli bacteria contamination originated at a slaughterhouse -- outside the plant -- but the recall is needed because of problems with meat handling, record keeping and safety testing, Agriculture Department officials said.

The plant will not open until the company has adopted "far more stringent safety standards," Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said.

The recall, which officials called the department's largest, covers all patties made by the plant that are still believed to be in the marketplace.

Recalls were announced last week, first with 20,000 pounds of meat, then another 20,000, and on Friday it became 1.2 million pounds.

Twenty-five million pounds of beef translates into 100 million quarter-pound hamburgers.

Glickman said officials discovered the plant had a practice of using leftover raw meat from one day in the next day's production. That makes it difficult to know when the last of the tainted meat left the plant.

Officials are looking at the seven slaughterhouses that were known to have supplied the plant, said Tom Billy, administrator of the Agriculture Department's Food Safety and Inspection Service.

"I'll tell you what -- this plant is clean," said Jarod Krueger, a Hudson security worker. "It's just depressing they have to send all these people home."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which investigated the E. coli outbreak associated with the patties in Colorado, said Thursday that 15 people became ill between June 14 and July 14. Five of them were hospitalized.

Eleven said they had eaten frozen patties, and eight specifically remembered eating Hudson Foods patties, the CDC said.

E. coli is a potentially deadly bacteria that often gets into food through contact with fecal matter. It causes severe diarrhea, cramps and dehydration and was blamed for three deaths and hundreds of illnesses in Washington state in 1993, mainly because of burgers that were not fully cooked.

Thorough cooking kills the bacteria, and officials stressed that consumers thoroughly cook hamburger, using a meat thermometer to make sure it is at least 160 degrees Fahrenheit.

The CDC said the Hudson patties may have been distributed to every state except Alaska and Hawaii.

Customers at a grocery store just down the road from the plant said the recall will not change their eating habits. Tom Penington said he ate some Hudson beef a couple weeks ago.

"If you cook it, it's not going to hurt you anyway," he said.

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DESCRIPTORS: CONTAMINATION

2/9/96 (Item 1 from file: 736)  
DIALOG(R)File 736:Seattle Post-Int.  
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09235041

BETTER PROCEDURES FOR MEAT PROCESSING  
SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER (SP) - Saturday, August 23, 1997  
Edition: Final Section: Editorial Page: A7  
Word Count: 508

MEMO:

Editorials

TYPE: EDITORIAL IN

TEXT:

With the recall of 25 million pounds of possibly tainted ground beef - enough for one Quarter Pounder for nine of every 10 working Americans - the nation's attention again is focused on the safety of its food supply.

This is dramatic evidence that more must be done, and sooner than planned, to assure the safety of meat sold to the public.

One reason for more rigorous inspections and safer meat processing procedures now is that the United States is years away from instituting more scientific methods of detecting bacteria, according to Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman. The new testing procedures won't be fully implemented in all packing plants until January 2000. And he warns that even these new tests for E. coli will not be foolproof.

E. coli 0157:H7 thrives in fecal matter. This latest case reared its ugly head in hamburger patties processed in Nebraska by Hudson Foods of Rogers, Ark. So far, 17 people have fallen ill, all in Colorado. Fortunately none have died - this time.

In 1993, four children died in this state after eating hamburgers contaminated by E. coli. Many others became ill.

Centers for Disease Control officials estimate 10,000 to 20,000 Americans become infected with E. coli each year and say 10 to 20 percent of those cases are linked to hamburgers. In all, 9,000 people die from bacteria in meat, poultry, seafood and vegetables each year in the U.S., and millions of Americans annually become ill from tainted food, health officials say.

While it's true that consumers must take personal responsibility for

proper handling of hamburger and for cooking it to 160 degrees, these appalling numbers indicate that present regulatory efforts are inadequate to protect the public.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture pressured Hudson into the voluntary recall after inspectors discovered hamburger patties left over from an earlier production run contaminated with E. coli were put into the production line the following day. That meant the company could not guarantee that any meat subsequently produced would be free of the bacteria.

The recall followed another one involving 1.2 million pounds at the plant a week ago. But upon closer inspection of the sort we'd like to see much more of, the USDA also found the plant had weak quality controls and an inadequate system of record keeping.

Company and USDA officials say they suspect the contamination did not occur at the plant but at the slaughterhouses that supply it. So investigators have not ruled out the possibility that slaughterhouses also may be recalling truckloads of trimmings supplied to ground-beef plants, according to The Wall Street Journal.

Anyone who has observed the mounds and lagoons of manure that envelop beef cattle wallowing in it while awaiting their doom in filthy feedlots can appreciate how this meat could have become contaminated during slaughtering.

If E. coli is to be removed from the meat supply, the feedlot is the place to start cleaning up the industry's act.

Until that happens, our advice is to eat ground beef at your own risk.

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DESCRIPTORS: FOOD; SAFETY; DISEASE

2/9/97 (Item 2 from file: 736)  
DIALOG(R)File 736:Seattle Post-Int.  
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09235033

RECALLED BEEF REPORTEDLY WASN'T DISTRIBUTED IN STATE  
SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER (SP) - Saturday, August 23, 1997  
By: P-I STAFF and NEWS SERVICES  
Edition: Final Section: News Page: A1  
Word Count: 1,129

MEMO:  
IN

TEXT:

WASHINGTON - One of the nation's biggest fast-food hamburger chains, Burger King Corp., tried to persuade customers to switch to chicken or fish sandwiches yesterday after the U.S. government forced a record recall of beef.

But Burger King said its restaurants in Washington state do not receive meat from Hudson Foods Inc. and were not affected by the recall.

Agriculture Department officials would not rule out taking further action once they find the source of the tainted beef, one day after the government forced Hudson Foods to close a Nebraska plant and recall a record 25 million pounds of frozen hamburger patties.

Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said a SWAT team" of investigators would continue combing through records and paperwork to determine which of six slaughterhouses supplied the bad beef to Hudson.

Neither the department nor Hudson would identify the six firms, which together operate 10 plants, saying it would be unfair to name names until the investigation is completed.

Once we've identified the slaughterhouse we will go back there to make sure their sanitation plans are in order and are being carried out," said Jacque Knight, a spokeswoman for the department's Food Safety and Inspection Service. We've had no further reports of any suspected outbreaks of illness."

Some Burger King restaurants in the Midwest posted hand-written signs saying the menu was temporarily limited to chicken or fish sandwiches because of the massive recall. Although the Miami-based company asked for

patience and loyalty" from customers, some diners were angered by the shortage of beef.

But the recall did not affect Burger King outlets in this state. Spokesmen for Boston Market, Safeway supermarkets and Costco stores also said their outlets in Washington state were not affected.

A U.S. Navy commissary at the Bremerton Naval Shipyard did pull less than 20 pounds of hamburger from its shelves as a precaution in the wake of a recent E. coli scare.

The meat at the commissary came from Hudson Foods. But it was from a different batch than the recalled hamburger, said shipyard spokesman John Gordon.

They had none of the meat that was identified as contaminated," he said. They did have some of the meat under that brand. It was just because it was that brand, they decided to remove it from the shelves."

Even though none of the tainted meat was distributed in Washington, some customers stayed away from Burger King outlets here yesterday. Business was off by half at the Elliott Avenue store near Terminal 91 last night, said manager Shirley Mascotti.

Mascotti said the local franchisee, Great Northwest, buys meat for Seattle-area stores from a wholesaler in Oregon that has not experienced

E.coli problems. But consumers just think it's everywhere," she said, and many in the Kingdome-bound baseball crowd passed by the restaurant on the way to the Mariners game. Some started ordering fish or other non-beef

items.

Our specialty sandwiches, like chicken, are going off the wall," she said.

But Donna Thomas of Tacoma brought her daughter Megan, 7, and son Andrew, 6, to the Elliott Avenue restaurant and ordered Whoppers.

She'd heard of the meat scare but hadn't realized it involved Burger King restaurants in other states before a reporter told her. A sister's friend's son had died of E. coli poisoning after eating a tainted burger at Jack in the Box, and Thomas was relieved to hear the scare hadn't reached the Northwest. If it had . . . I wouldn't have eaten here," she said.

Some customers said a local meat scare wouldn't have kept them from ordering Burger King hamburgers.

One, Kent resident Wayne Brouillet, said he trusts fast-food chains to redouble their efforts to cook meat thoroughly once tainted beef is discovered. When that happens, it's the best time to get hamburgers well-done," Brouillet said.

Nationally, Burger King sought to reassure customers its customers. We have never had tainted beef in our system and there is no need to worry," said Paul Clayton, North American president of Burger King Corp.

Burger King dispatched trucks to pick up remaining Hudson patties and replace them with meat from other suppliers.

Wal-Mart Stores, Safeway Inc. and other grocery stores also pulled Hudson frozen hamburger patties from the shelves.

Executives with Arkansas-based Hudson have blamed the contamination on outside suppliers, and said they were cooperating with investigators. The shutdown of the plant will cost Hudson, which had sales of about \$1.4 billion last year, about \$2 million a week in lost sales.

E.coli from animal feces can contaminate meat and other foods, causing diarrhea, dehydration and even kidney failure. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates as many as 20,000 Americans are infected with E.coli each year and 10 percent to 20 percent of those cases are linked to hamburger.

A virulent strain of the bacteria, E.coli:0157, was blamed for two dozen deaths in Japan and Scotland last year.

Food safety experts said the bacteria is destroyed by thorough cooking, and using a thermometer to make sure that the meat has reached 160 degrees Fahrenheit.

I would not hesitate to go to Burger King any day to eat a hamburger," said Daniel Fung, professor of food science at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas.

Fung and other industry experts contend that the U.S. meat supply is the safest in the world, although he called for more testing in the food industry for microorganisms.

U.S. ground beef prices, which had been under pressure due to increasing supplies, slipped lower due in part to the recall.

It's going to keep a few consumers away. How many is the real question," A.G. Edwards livestock futures analyst Dan Vaught said of the Hudson Foods recall.

Hudson's state-of-the-art plant in Columbus, Nebraska, was closed indefinitely Thursday after investigators learned the company had improperly mixed leftover hamburger from the previous day into new batches of hamburger patties.

The recall was seized upon by consumer groups as evidence that tougher rules are needed to protect the food supply.

The Clinton administration said it would press for new legislation next month that would give the agency the authority to summarily close a food plant and order a recall, instead of having to ask a company to do so.

The fact that only 18 people became sick - and none died - from eating the contaminated meat showed that the existing food safety system works reasonably well, Glickman said.

In 1994, a similar outbreak of E.coli bacteria in hamburgers sold by the Jack in the Box chain made 700 people sick in the Northwest and caused four deaths. Because of our improvements over the last three years, we're doing a much better job of finding the contamination and protecting the public from it," Glickman said.

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DESCRIPTORS: FOOD; DISEASE

2/9/99 (Item 1 from file: 739)  
DIALOG(R)File 739:The Fresno Bee  
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09235061

**E. COLI OUTBREAK TRIGGERS LARGEST FOOD RECALL IN U.S. HISTORY;  
NEBRASKA MEAT  
PLANT WILL BE CLOSED UNTIL IT CAN PROVE IT MEETS FEDERAL REGULATIONS.**

Fresno Bee (FB) - FRIDAY, August 22, 1997

By: Lance Gay & Sean Gorman Scripps Howard News Servi

Edition: HOME Section: TELEGRAPH Page: A6

Word Count: 428

**TEXT:**

WASHINGTON - Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman on Thursday announced the largest food recall in U.S. history, calling back 25 million pounds of possibly contaminated meat products that had come from a Hudson Foods plant in Nebraska.

Glickman said the plant will be closed until Hudson convinces federal inspectors that it complies with testing and record-keeping procedures designed to keep contaminated meat from the markets.

Meat from the plant, which is distributed nationwide, has been linked to E. coli bacteria contamination that sickened more than a dozen people in Colorado.

The company said in a statement late Thursday that it is suspending operations at the Columbus, Neb., plant and recalling all raw ground beef products that bear the establishment's number 13569.

"This is clearly the best action to take in the public's interest," said Hudson Food Chairman James Hudson. The plant accounted for \$91 million of the company's \$1.4 billion in sales last year.

Glickman said he intended to withdraw federal food inspectors from the plant if Hudson had not agreed with the plan.

Glickman's announcement was a sharp reversal of his assurances given just Wednesday that a previous Agriculture Department recall of 1.2 million pounds of contaminated hamburger meat was sufficient. The recall began last week with a company announcement that it was recalling 20,000 pounds of meat.

Tom Billy, administrator of the Agriculture Department's food safety service, said a departmental "SWAT team" sent to the plant discovered that some of the meat previously recalled might have contaminated other batches of Hudson products.

Billy said inspectors couldn't determine what other meat products might have been contaminated, but there are preliminary indications of contamination in hamburger produced at the plant on June 5 and July 14.

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which is investigating the Colorado outbreak, said Thursday that 15 people became ill between June 14 and July 14. Five were hospitalized. Eleven said they had eaten patties that had been frozen, and eight specifically remembered eating Hudson Foods patties, the CDC said.

Billy said major customers of Hudson's hamburger include Burger King, Boston Market, Sam's Club and Safeway. It is also sold in the school-lunch program and to universities.

He urged consumers to fully cook all hamburgers. The bacterium is "very susceptible to heat. That's why there's a very important message for consumers in all this, and that is cook your hamburgers thoroughly. Cook them to 160 degrees Fahrenheit, and use a thermometer to do that. It's critical," he said.

**CAPTION:**

1 Photo

**DAN GLICKMAN**

**BY: Lance Gay & Sean Gorman Scripps Howard News Service**

2/9/109 (Item 1 from file: 743)  
DIALOG(R)File 743:(New Jersey)The Record  
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09234101

**USDA RECALLING CHICKEN FROM SCHOOLS IN 33 STATES**

Record (Northern New Jersey) (RE) - FRIDAY, August 22, 1997

By: FROM STAFF AND NEWS SERVICE REPORTS

Edition: All Editions Section: NEWS Page: a09

Word Count: 273

**MEMO:**

**FOOD**

**TEXT:**

WASHINGTON - The Agriculture Department is recalling chicken nuggets and patties from schools in 33 states, including New Jersey, because they may contain dioxin, the USDA's Food and Consumer Service division reported.

Government inspectors last month found that poultry feed from a Mississippi plant contained elevated levels of dioxin, which is suspected of causing cancer.

When it came to light that some of the birds that ate the feed had been slaughtered and shipped to school systems, the USDA negotiated an agreement with the supplier to replace the product, said Thomas J. Billy, administrator of the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service. He did not identify the supplier.

"We've asked the school systems to dispose of the product they have," which had been bought for the coming school year, he said.

Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said he has directed USDA staff members to study ways of making recall information more readily available to the public. Although the USDA does not currently put out news releases on recalls that don't affect products shipped to supermarkets, he said, "the public has a paramount right to know."

U.S. Department of Agriculture officials say the 275,000 pounds of chicken nuggets and other chicken products that were shipped to New Jersey pose no threat to students.

Agriculture Department Undersecretary Shirley Watkins says most of the chicken, which was shipped late last year, has already been consumed. State officials have been requested to notify schools to return any unused

chicken.

Watkins added that the level of dioxins present in the chicken is not enough to seriously injure a consumer. "It doesn't pose any immediate health risk or threat," she said.

DESCRIPTORS: COLUMN; USA; GOVERNMENT; AGRICULTURE; FOOD; SCHOOL

Copyright 1997 The Denver Post Corporation  
The Denver Post

August 27, 1997 Wednesday 2D EDITION

SECTION: DENVER & THE WEST; Pg. B-06

LENGTH: 573 words

HEADLINE: For safer hamburgers

BODY:

The New York Times said in an editorial Tuesday:

The American public, alarmed by the discovery that 25 million pounds of its favorite barbecue food may have been contaminated with potentially lethal E. coli bacteria, can be reassured by Washington's quick action to get the meat recalled. Yet to guard against future episodes, the federal government must move swiftly to put a new regulatory system in place.

Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman wasted no time in forcing Hudson Foods, which distributed the tainted hamburgers implicated in the illnesses of more than a dozen people in Colorado, to close a processing plant and order the largest meat recall in U.S. history. His actions were especially heartening, given his department's history of protecting the industry at the public's expense. But the episode has also pointed to several areas where the government's response on meat safety needs strengthening.

Over the next three years, a new and better inspection system called Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point will be phased in to replace the old and chancy "sniff and poke" method used by Agriculture Department inspectors. Under the old system, inspectors had only a few seconds to determine if animal and bird carcasses on an assembly line showed obvious signs of spoilage. The new system, which will become mandatory for large companies in January, and for medium-sized operations like Hudson a year later, requires closer monitoring by the plant and by federal inspectors at each critical point in the process.

Most significantly, the monitoring will include regular testing for harmful bacteria. Such testing would probably have done a better job of detecting the E. coli bacteria than the less rigorous measures used at Hudson. While Hudson says the plant did some general testing, it was clearly insufficient, given the company's production - as much as 400,000 pounds of processed meat in an eight-hour shift. Furthermore, the company routinely mixed unused raw meat into the next day's raw meat, a risky practice.

Glickman should be encouraging meat-processing plants to step up their compliance with the new regulations even before they are legally bound to. Beyond that, the Clinton administration should take the opportunity of the Hudson case to press Congress for overdue changes, giving the agriculture secretary authority to execute mandatory recalls of products and to impose civil penalties where warranted. When the public may be at risk, the government should not have to rely on persuasion and companies' goodwill.

Hudson insists that the tainted meat had to come from one of its suppliers, and agriculture officials say it is likely that the meat was contaminated

The Denver Post, August 27, 1997 Wednesday

before reaching the plant. They now need to check carefully the seven slaughterhouses that supplied raw meat to Hudson. But the E. coli problem starts in the gut of the animal, and the government lacks authority to trace bacteria back to conditions at the farm. Congress needs to approve a tracing system. At the same time, more money needs to be invested in research to better understand how to avoid the spread of dangerous bacteria.

Burger King, meanwhile, has now fired Hudson as a ground beef supplier. Beyond any government action, one positive result of the Hudson episode is that it may encourage companies that do business with processing plants and slaughterhouses to demand more in the way of safety assurances.

LOAD-DATE: August 27, 1997

## LEVEL 1 - 2 OF 69 STORIES

Copyright 1997 The Omaha World-Herald Company  
Omaha World-Herald

August 27, 1997, Wednesday SUNRISE EDITION

SECTION: NEWS; Pg. 9

LENGTH: 648 words

HEADLINE: Mandatory Recall Power Called Unlikely

SOURCE: BLOOMBERG BUSINESS NEWS

DATELINE: Washington

BODY:

Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman is not likely to persuade Congress to give him the power he wants to order recalls of food suspected of contamination, meat industry and consumer advocates said Tuesday.

"We don't think mandatory recalls or civil penalties are going to improve consumer protection," said Sara Lilygren, a lobbyist for the American Meat Institute, whose members include ConAgra Inc. and the beef processing unit of Cargill Inc. "We think the solution is in technology and education."

Carol Tucker Foreman, the top food-safety official in the Carter administration who now heads the Safe Food Coalition, a Washington-based consumer advocacy group, said recall legislation is unlikely to pass "this year, next year or the year after."

Next month Glickman will ask Congress to give him authority to order recalls and impose fines in cases where "the public's safety is compromised." Such recalls are now voluntary.

The proposed legislation, still being drafted, follows the recall of 25 million pounds of hamburger patties processed by Hudson Foods Inc.'s Columbus, Neb., plant. The meat is suspected of harboring the potentially deadly E. coli bacteria.

"I do not have the authority to order a recall," Glickman said last week, adding that "most folks would be shocked to know that the industry" recalls meat, not the government. Glickman said it's "one of the biggest loopholes out there."

The top two Republican leaders of the Agriculture Committees in Congress, Sen. Richard Lugar of Indiana and Rep. Bob Smith of Oregon, were unavailable for comment and aides declined to comment. Congress returns from its summer recess on Sept. 2.

"You've got a lot of public concern out there" over food safety and "we think he's on the right track," said Art Jaeger, executive director of Public Voice for Food and Health Policy. Still, he said, "it's not going to slide through Congress" easily, because of industry opposition.

The Agriculture Department in 1994 and 1995 asked for such recall powers. either house acted on the request.

Ms. Foreman said the main reason for recall legislation is that it would remove any suspected foodstuffs from the marketplace more quickly.

"Now, it's all voluntary," said Ms. Foreman. "The company gets to negotiate - how much is going to be removed, and when -while time passes and consumers are still eating (suspected) products."

The American Meat Institute, which represents 70 percent of all meat and turkey processed in the U.S., says the USDA has all the leverage it needs to remove suspect food products from grocery shelves or restaurants, making legislation unnecessary.

For example, the USDA can withdraw federal inspectors from a plant, the group's lobbyist said, or the department can withdraw its "USDA Inspected" seal that's needed for shipping meat and poultry products across state lines.

Ms. Lilygren noted that more than 7,000 federal meat and poultry inspectors have power to shut production lines at 6,500 processing plants.

"Nobody's going to dodge a recall" and risk a public relations black eye, she said.

Instead of legislation, more research needs to be done to detect and control disease outbreaks, she said.

A new food safety program, Hazardous Analysis and Critical Control Points, will step up inspection and testing of the most risky parts of meat and poultry processing, from the slaughterhouse to the grocery store.

The program began in January 1997 and will be completely in place by January 2000.

The National Cattlemen's Beef Association "will work with the secretary if he thinks he needs more power," said lobbyist Chandler Keys, but the trade group is skeptical.

"You've gone 90 years without it," he said, "and any time the government's asked industry for a recall, they've gotten it."

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: August 27, 1997

## LEVEL 1 - 4 OF 69 STORIES

Copyright 1997 The Courier-Journal  
The Courier-Journal (Louisville, KY.)

August 26, 1997, Tuesday MET:METRO

SECTION: FORUM Pg.06A

LENGTH: 382 words

HEADLINE: Closer watch on food

SOURCE: STAFF

BODY:

The American food industry is dealing with a whopper of a recall.

In Colorado, 17 people who ate tainted hamburger are fighting an illness that can rip the lining from a person's heart and tear intestines. Hudson Foods Co. has recalled 25 million pounds of ground beef because the Agriculture Department discovered that some meat processed by the company may have been contaminated with a deadly strain of bacteria. Burger King is scrambling for new suppliers. And Americans have a new food fret.

One difference between this recall and others is scale - it's the largest beef recall ever. Another difference is its visibility. Consumers don't always get the word about food recalls; indeed, since 1995, five of 51 health-related recalls have involved ground beef possibly contaminated with E. coli 0157.H7, the bacteria found in the Hudson beef, but none was publicly announced.

The reason consumers may not get the word about spoiled foods is that the U. S. Department of Agriculture can't demand recalls. It must rely on the culprit to conduct recalls and spread the word.

After prodding from Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman, Hudson Foods recalled the beef and warned consumers about the distribution of possibly tainted frozen hamburger patties to supermarkets and wholesale stores. However, its press releases didn't mention that tons of the meat had gone to Burger King and another chain, Boston Chicken.

So, not only does the the food industry get to make the call on recalls, it also fashions its own spin.

Since 1993, when four children died from eating tainted hamburgers, the Clinton administration has taken numerous steps to increase confidence in food safety. Yet too much responsibility for quality control remains vested in industry.

Another problem: The Agriculture Department has too few food inspectors. In 1981, the FDA performed 21,000 inspections of food processing plants; today the agency has the resources to do only 5,000 inspections annually.

Another problem: Many of the government's food inspectors are under-trained. And still another: They're scattered in too many different agencies. (For more, see facing page.)

The Courier-Journal (Louisville, KY.), August 26, 1997

Federal policy should tilt toward protecting consumers; instead, as the hopper recall shows, it favors producers.

LANGUAGE: English

LOAD-DATE: August 27, 1997

LEVEL 1 - 5 OF 69 STORIES

Copyright 1997 The Omaha World-Herald Company  
Omaha World-Herald

August 26, 1997, Tuesday SUNRISE EDITION

SECTION: NEWS; Pg. 2

LENGTH: 325 words

HEADLINE: Nelson Would Back Middle Road on Sanctions

BYLINE: LESLIE BOELLSTORFF

SOURCE: WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

DATELINE: Lincoln

BODY:

Gov. Nelson said Monday he would support the development of intermediate sanctions to be used by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to deal with cases of tainted meat.

Nelson said he was not second-guessing the USDA decision last week to close down the Hudson Foods plant in Columbus, Neb., because it essentially was the only sanction available. Still, he said, it was an extreme action.

"It was a massive decision that can have all kind of ramifications that may be more far-reaching than appropriate under the circumstances," Nelson said. "What we have here is what I call the dilemma of extremes. They could do nothing, which is unacceptable. Or they can do everything - recall 25 million pounds of beef and shut down the plant - which is too extreme."

The USDA acted under its authority to pull its inspectors from the plant, which effectively shut down the facility, Nelson said.

Although Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said it was not "a panic situation," the closure of the plant created panic, Nelson said.

He said the USDA needs specific authority to take specific steps. If record-keeping were a concern, one idea would be to close down operations in a certain area until the record-keeping is caught up, he said. Another idea would be to target the recall to meat intended for home use, compared with meat destined for restaurants, where there have been no reported problems in the Hudson case.

Nelson also noted that the problems could have been prevented with proper cooking.

"I believe we have some obligation to cook food thoroughly," he said. "If not, we take some risk."

Nelson also said he thinks the handling of the Hudson case should reassure Americans about the safety of beef. Americans have the world's safest food supply, he said, and it is subject to the most stringent requirements.

"People's confidence should be increased as a result of this," he said.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: August 27, 1997

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Omaha World-Herald

August 26, 1997, Tuesday BULLDOG EDITION

SECTION: NEWS; Pg. 1

LENGTH: 1368 words

HEADLINE: E. Coli Scare Hasn't Dulled Consumers' Taste for Beef

BYLINE: HENRY J. CORDES

SOURCE: WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

BODY:

Walking past the airport newsstand with its banner headlines about E. coli bacteria and contaminated beef, Alan Tisel strode up to the Omaha Steaks gift counter and plunked down \$ 35 for a four-pack of filet mignons.

"If I was concerned about it, I certainly wouldn't be buying frozen meat to take home with me," the Chicago businessman said before boarding his plane at Eppley Airfield.

That seems typical of how most consumers are reacting to the recall of more than 25 million pounds of hamburger suspected of E. coli contamination from a Columbus, Neb., processing plant-the biggest meat recall in U.S. history.

Many consumers say that despite the recall they still see such problems as isolated and rare, not a serious threat to their health. Others say they know they have nothing to fear if they properly handle their beef and thoroughly cook it. Most concerns seem limited to whether consumers are getting beef from Hudson Foods, the company that operates the Columbus ground beef plant.

Industry experts say such reactions seem consistent with those in other recent food scares.

"On an incident like this, there is usually some level of concern out there, especially with the particular brand involved," said Dennis Burson, extension meat specialist for the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. "But as you get farther from the event, confidence builds and it becomes old news."

However, he and other industry officials say that could change quickly if reported cases of contamination become more frequent in the future. They say it probably would not take many contamination incidents over a short period of time to taint consumer confidence in beef.

"That has to be a concern to those in the beef industry," Burson said.

It's not an issue that Nebraska's \$ 5 billion beef industry is taking lightly. No state has a bigger stake in America's taste for steaks and hamburgers than Nebraska.

Nebraska's 28,000 ranchers annually battle it out with Texas and Kansas for No. 1 in cattle production, and the state's packing plants also rank No. 1 in

Omaha World-Herald, August 26, 1997

roduction. A recent University of Nebraska study found that one in seven jobs in Nebraska is tied to beef.

The beef industry in Nebraska has gone to great lengths to make the Nebraska label on corn-fed beef as synonymous for quality as Idaho for potatoes. The last thing Nebraska producers want is consumers both here and abroad associating their product with dangerous bacteria.

"If confidence erodes to the point consumers buy less beef because they perceive it is unsafe, we've got a big problem," said Mike Fitzgerald, spokesman for Nebraska Cattlemen. "And if feeders and ranchers don't profit, they don't go to Main Street and buy."

To make sure beef continues to be, as the slogan goes, "what's for dinner," the industry has used the public attention on the Hudson recall as a teaching tool. Consumers have repeatedly been reminded that they can ensure their own safety by properly handling and cooking beef, including cooking hamburgers all the way through so no pink is showing.

"If people learn how to protect themselves, their confidence comes back rather quickly," said Elton Aberle, director of the Animal Science Department at UNL.

The industry also has stressed the steps it's taken in recent years to improve sanitation both on the farm and at the packing house. It won't stop there, industry officials said. They say they will take further action to make sure incidents of contamination remain rare.

"Producers do not play Russian roulette with food safety," said Pat Ptacek, deputy director of the Nebraska Department of Agriculture. "They are in the business to provide a safe and wholesome product because without that they have no market."

The country's latest food safety scare began Aug. 12 when federal officials traced illnesses of more than a dozen people in Colorado to frozen beef patties that came from Hudson's Columbus plant. Officials suspect the patties were infected with E. coli O157:H7, a potentially deadly bacteria found in animal feces.

The recall reached a record 1 million pounds within days and then ballooned to 25 million pounds five days ago when Hudson, at the USDA's urging, announced the plant would shut down indefinitely. U.S. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said the plant would not reopen until it adopted far more stringent safety standards.

The recall made national headlines, and there's no doubt consumers took notice.

Denise Rodriguez of Omaha said news reports of the recall arrived a day after she and relatives sat down in Portland for a big cookout featuring 40 pounds of beef they'd brought especially from Nebraska. It provided quite a scare, she said.

"Everyone was real concerned at first," she said.

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But concerns among most consumers appear to have been short-lived. Lines in fast-food restaurants were long and beef flowed out of supermarket meat counters.

The cattle market also reflected confidence, hardly rippling over the news. In fact, cattle prices last week were up slightly from where they'd been before the recall.

"That's a pretty good way to gauge what consumers are thinking and saying," Fitzgerald said.

The E. coli scare didn't seem to diminish the passion customers have for the fare at Louie M's Burger Lust near 17th and Vinton Streets in south Omaha.

As usual, the weekday lunch crowd was lined up waiting for tables in the popular burger joint. The only evidence of the news from the past week was the sign owner Louie Marcuzzo posted by the door: "No Frozen Patties!"

Customer Ann Castro noted that even vegetables are at times found to be contaminated with E. coli bacteria. She said it makes no sense to cut every food out of your diet that at one time has been the subject of a food warning.

"It would be like a phobia," she said as she and her friends ate half-pound hamburgers, Louie's specialty. "You'd never eat."

Most consumers' concerns seemed limited to the Hudson label.

"The primary question we're getting is: 'Do we carry Hudson beef?'" said Alicia Penas, spokeswoman for Baker's Supermarkets in Omaha. "The answer to that is no."

Similarly, the Omaha Steaks office in southwest Omaha fielded more than 75 calls from beef-eaters concerned about the Hudson recall. But spokeswoman Sharon Grunkin said most callers mainly wanted to know whether the Omaha Steaks meat sitting in their freezers came from the Hudson plant, and didn't seem concerned once they learned it had not.

Much of the consumer alarm over the E. coli outbreak may have been blunted by the beef industry's quick response.

Industry officials had been through this before. Four years ago an E. coli outbreak at Jack-in-the-Box restaurants on the West Coast left four dead and sickened more than 700 others.

Numerous steps that have been taken since 1993 to improve food safety. They include enhanced and stepped up testing for E. coli, new sanitation processes, including steam and chemical rinses, and improved tracking of meat through the process from start to finish.

"The packing industry has made tremendous strides to improve sanitation and prevent contamination in the first place," Aberle said. "The condition of the food product today is better than it's ever been."

Aberle said there is still no way to guarantee 100 percent of the product coming out of beef plants is free of bacteria. But consumers can be sure that

what they put on their plate is wholesome if they prepare it right, he said.

Cooking meat all the way through, so the internal temperature hits at least 160 degrees, has been proven to kill any bacteria, including E. coli, he said.

In fact, if any good has come out of the Hudson recall, consumers apparently are a lot better informed on how they can make sure what they eat won't make them sick. That was evident at Omaha Steaks' Eppley counter, where one outbound flier zipped four New York strips into his travel bag before rushing to catch his plane.

"I'm not concerned," he said. "I'm going to cook them up right and enjoy them."

GRAPHIC: Color Photo/1NO FEAR: Business travelers Barbara Haperman and Ray Grace stopped by the Omaha Steaks counter Thursday at Eppley Airfield. After purchasing steaks and burgers to take back to Scranton, Pa., Grace said he wasn't worried about E. coli bacteria.; JILL SAGERS/WORLD-HERALD/1sf

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: August 27, 1997

LEVEL 1 - 7 OF 69 STORIES

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The Columbian (Vancouver, WA.)

August 25, 1997, Monday

*(AP story ran  
in newspaper  
all over the  
country)*

SECTION: A section; Pg. 7

LENGTH: 1026 words

HEADLINE: MEAT TESTS CAN'T FIND ALL BACTERIA, INSPECTORS SAY

BYLINE: By CURT ANDERSON ; Associated Press writer

BODY:

WASHINGTON -- No matter how sophisticated government testing of meat and poultry becomes, the sheer volume produced in America may make it impossible to detect all dangerous bacteria in food, inspectors say.

"There is probably no way to absolutely foolproof this process," Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said last week.

For example, the Hudson Foods Co. ground beef plant in Nebraska, shut down last week during a federal probe into E. coli contamination, had been producing up to 3 million pounds of frozen hamburger every week.

That's 12 million quarter-pound patties.

Agriculture Department inspectors go to slaughterhouses that supply Hudson and the Hudson plant itself. But it is not practical to test all that meat for E. coli, salmonella or other bacteria that can make people sick, officials say.

And health risks in the meat industry can start well before the cattle reach slaughterhouses.

Agriculture experts told U.S. News & World Report that farmers often add waste substances to livestock and poultry feed. Chicken manure, which is cheaper than alfalfa, is increasingly used as feed by cattle farmers despite possible health risks to consumers, says the magazine reaching newsstands today.

"Feeding manure that has not been properly processed is supercharging the cattle feces with pathogens likely to cause disease in consumers," Dr. Neal Barnard of the Washington-based health lobby, Physicians for Responsible Medicine, told the magazine.

This can make the Agriculture Department meat inspectors' job even harder.

Tight budgets at the agency just exacerbate the problem. The number of inspectors at the agency's Food Safety and Inspection Service fell from about 12,000 in 1978 to 7,500 today -- to cover the 6,500 private meat and poultry plants around the country.

The Hudson situation has shaken some Americans' confidence, a new Newsweek poll found, with 54 percent saying they are less likely to buy burgers at fast-food restaurants and 41 percent saying they are less likely to buy hamburger meat at grocery stores.

The Columbian (Vancouver, WA.), August 25, 1997

Feeling customers' concerns, Burger King announced Saturday that it no longer could buy ground beef from Hudson's Columbus, Neb., plant. A statement by Hudson called it "a serious disappointment" because Burger King had been a major purchaser.

According to the Newsweek poll, 62 percent said the government should spend more money on food inspection to ensure that U.S.-produced food is safe, with an even division over whether the government is already doing a good job. The Aug. 22 survey of 501 adults, appearing in the magazine on newsstands today, has a five percentage point margin of error.

Pathogens such as E. coli remain a health problem in America. The federal Centers for Disease Control estimates that up to 9,800 E. coli cases and 120,000 salmonella cases a year occur when people don't sufficiently cook ground beef containing the bacteria. Cooking at high enough temperatures will kill the germs.

Together, the microbes cost upwards of \$ 500 million a year in medical bills and lost productivity, according to a USDA estimate.

The first meat inspection laws date back to 1906, in the wake of books such as Upton Sinclair's "The Jungle" that exposed the once-filthy conditions in the packing industry.

Under those laws, which remain essentially unchanged for 90 years, USDA inspectors worked inside private meat and poultry plants nationwide. They examined sample carcasses and products by sight, smell and touch, trying to determine if the product was safe and wholesome.

But the federal rules never required scientific tests for bacteria like E. coli. Some larger companies did it anyway, while smaller ones tested only if customers had specific requirements.

Now, new inspection rules are being phased in by the year 2000 that for the first time require some scientific testing for bacteria at all meat and poultry processing plants. In the case of E. coli, all plants regardless of size had to begin their own testing last Jan. 27.

Even that will involve only samples taken once or twice a day from plants that can move tens of thousands of pounds of meat a day.

Still, Glickman said the focus will be on critical points in plants where contamination is likely. In the case of E. coli, animal fecal matter is the most frequent source, so tests will be done at points along the chain where its presence is prevalent, such as after cattle are slaughtered, when the meat is cut into large pieces for various uses.

"Hopefully you'll be able to discover problems much earlier in the process," Glickman said.

Such scientific testing generally involves taking a sample from meat, putting it in a lab dish and testing it chemically to see if harmful bacteria are present.

The Columbian (Vancouver, WA.), August 25, 1997

At Hudson, company officials agreed to recall all the beef processed at the plant since the date of contamination -- up to 25 million pounds -- and to shut down the plant until stronger safety recommendations were met. There was no indication when the plant might reopen.

Company founder James T. Hudson said the Nebraska plant had done 57 E. coli tests of its own since the beginning of 1997. All were negative.

The source of contamination for Hudson beef patties processed during three days in early June has not been found. But government and company officials say it likely came from a slaughterhouse supplier outside the plant.

Thus, Hudson said the company will now do E. coli testing on the meat arriving from slaughterhouses.

"We're going to start inspecting every lot that comes in, rather than just depending on the supplier," he said. "We're going to visit with some of our suppliers and make sure we're comfortable with their testing."

The new federal rules also require companies to keep much better records of their testing and monitoring, and to enable officials to trace the source of any contamination that does occur.

But in Hudson's case, the medium-sized Nebraska plant won't have to comply fully with the rules until January 1999. Federal inspectors said last week they were investigating whether Hudson's record keeping had been lacking.

GRAPHIC: DENNIS GRUNDMAN/The Associated Press \* Shut down: Workers at the Hudson Foods Plant in Columbus, Neb., process ground beef . The plant was shut down last week during a federal probe into E. coli contamination.

LOAD-DATE: August 26, 1997

LEVEL 1 - 10 OF 69 STORIES

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August 24, 1997, Sunday

SECTION: BUSINESS; Pg. 1A

LENGTH: 2432 words

HEADLINE: USDA loud and unclear

BYLINE: ANDREA HARTER, ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

BODY:

In a show of muscle, the government's protector of the food supply last week promised a more diligent look at what's making America sick.

But the U.S. Department of Agriculture does not have the technology to make any germ-free promises to the public, especially concerning potentially deadly *Escherichia coli* 0157:H7 bacteria.

The want-to may be there, but the government's own reports show it has handicapped itself; a make-over of its 90-year-old meat inspection plan does not require meat companies to look for *E. coli* 0157:H7.

Given that, the plan -- it is known as Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points, or HACCP for short, and took effect in January -- seems crippled from the start.

That is why some say the USDA looked more like a big bully than a big brother in last week's recall of 25 million pounds of hamburger by Hudson Foods Inc. of Rogers -- the largest meat recall ever. The company recall came at the USDA's request.

"The agency is coming across as both," said John Marcy, a food scientist at the University of Arkansas who testified before Congress in 1994 on the dangers of *E. coli* 0157:H7. He is a member of the Food Safety Consortium, a congressionally funded group of academicians who research food-production issues.

"If you simply look at the [USDA's] Food Safety and Inspection Service -- and their job is to ensure food safety -- they can't do it, and they know they can't. Why they say otherwise is troublesome," Marcy said.

"The USDA is in an impossible situation," said Sara Lilygren, spokesman for the American Meat Institute in Washington. "Here they have this brand-new rule to strengthen sanitation and keep germs out, which is good, but they know that even if a company was engaging in the best possible sanitation, where you could eat off of the floor, that it's still no guarantee of safety."

But few want to pick a fight with the USDA. A manufacturer can't sell meat without the agency's seal of inspection, and the agency has the public's ear. Industry sees it as a sleeping giant it doesn't want to irritate.

Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, August 24, 1997

Both industry and scientists are sure the USDA doesn't have the wherewithal to combat the E. coli problem. But Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman told the public another story last week.

In a Thursday news conference, Glickman hailed his new plan as the answer to the problem of E. coli 0157:H7-tainted meat. The plan, Glickman said, "for the first time ever" will allow the department to mature from poke-and-sniff inspection to a scientific approach to eliminating hidden contaminants like E. coli.

Marcy and others speculate that Glickman is feeling pressure to make good on President Clinton's initiative to make food safe. In 1993, months after Clinton was elected to a first term, the largest-ever outbreak of E. coli 0157:H7 poisoning killed four children and made more than 700 people sick at Jack in the Box restaurants in the Pacific Northwest.

"What happened was the USDA saying at that time, 'We're not responsible, but we won't let it happen again,' " Marcy said. "Now, you've got the USDA asserting it has control of the food supply on paper. But in reality, in science, they don't."

#### Leftover meat

The Arkansas Democrat-Gazette interviewed several top food microbiologists who were critical of the USDA's treatment of Hudson Foods. At the urging of the USDA, the company, whose main product is chicken, recalled 25 million pounds of raw, frozen hamburger patties.

It started with a batch of tainted meat produced June 5 at Hudson's Columbus, Neb., further-processing plant. The plant was closed indefinitely Thursday and won't reopen until the USDA finishes its investigation. At least 15 people in Colorado got sick after eating bad burgers, health officials said.

State investigators in Florida were testing Hudson hamburgers this weekend that may have caused a 14-year-old Royal Palm Beach girl to be hospitalized and sickened a Vero Beach family of four.

The Hudson plant and many others use leftover meat from one day's production as the start-up meat for the next day's orders. The USDA worries that the contamination spread to the products made after the infected meat was processed in June.

The contamination did not originate at the Hudson plant. It came from an unidentified supplier's slaughterhouse, which was USDA-inspected. The meat that arrived at Hudson's plant bore a government inspection seal.

Hudson officials aren't talking publicly about the USDA's actions, except to say they are pledging full cooperation. Privately, they talk about the raw deal the company is getting, taking the blame and the bad press that follows a food scare.

And Wall Street has weighed in. A report issued Friday by the nation's largest financial-services conglomerate, Merrill Lynch Pierce Fenner & Smith, said that Glickman had not addressed the USDA's role in inspecting meat that arrived at the Hudson plant. Merrill was the lead underwriter in Hudson's

Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, August 24, 1997

latest stock offering of 4 million shares in 1994.

The USDA agreed that the order by Glickman to send in investigators, whom he called a SWAT team, may have seemed heavy-handed.

"It may appear that we've come down a little hard, but what if we did nothing?" asked Jacque Knight, a Food Safety and Inspection Service spokesman. Glickman's use of the term SWAT team "got people's attention."

Knight said agency officials were too busy to explain how a recall of last week's magnitude weighed against the new food-safety plan.

Rather, she pointed to Hudson's foot-dragging during the initial investigation. She said the USDA called Hudson on Aug. 8 to make inquiries. Then five investigators were sent to the Hudson plant, with five more dispatched by the USDA inspector general. Another seven inspectors were sent to company headquarters in Rogers to search for inspection records.

"Hudson was not forthcoming with the records, rather, not as forthcoming as they should have been," Knight said. "They knew we were coming; they should have had those records ready and waiting."

Hudson's statements to the media and its employees rebut those charges, saying the company has done everything -- and more -- that the USDA has asked of it.

The bigger question is this: What does the USDA expect to find in Hudson's inspection records?

#### Random testing

Phase one of the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points plan went into effect in January. The rules require large processing plants, including slaughter operations, to begin mandatory testing for generic E. coli. There are more than 2,000 strains of the bacteria; most aren't dangerous.

That test tells the company only one thing: that, somewhere along the way, fecal material, in which E. coli live, may have come into contact with raw meat. A positive result does not mean the meat will cause sickness, only that there was a weak link in the sanitation chain. It's like a yellow traffic light -- it warns workers that something could go wrong if they aren't more careful.

The USDA, on the other hand, is required to do more stringent tests for the specific 0157:H7 strain. But its testing is random and does not represent close monitoring. The department's guidelines call for one in 300 cows to be tested.

Consider this: 25 billion pounds of meat is produced annually in the United States. Seven billion pounds of that is ground beef. Since 1994, the USDA has only tested 15,000 meat samples -- each sample less than one-quarter of a teaspoon in size -- for the bad E. coli. They found seven cases of it.

Even when inspectors go out of their way, they can't find it. The Nationwide Federal Plant Raw Ground Beef Microbiological Survey conducted from August 93-March 1994 made surprise inspections of 789 plants during a seven-month period. It found no 0157:H7 in the 563 samples gathered.

Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, August 24, 1997

It did find that 11 percent of those samples contained Listeria, 7.5 percent contained Salmonella and a minute fraction -- 0.002 percent -- contained Campylobacter, all sickness-causing bacteria the government wants its new food-safety plan to curb.

So where is the E. coli coming from and why is it so hard to find?

The answers are unknown, but the possibilities are frightening.

easily, widely spread.

Kate Glynn, a veterinarian and medical epidemiologist at the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, said researchers suspect the organism gets a foothold at the farm. It seems to thrive in the cooler, northern climates. It lives in a cow's intestines; if the intestines are ruptured when the cow's entrails are pulled out during slaughter, it can contaminate meat.

It's a messy subject all around. Since E. coli lives in bovine waste, then fertilizer, too, could be contaminated, which provides a possible explanation for O157:H7 outbreaks in strawberries and alfalfa sprouts and the contamination of a Massachusetts apple cider mill in 1991. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration said in 1994 that cider was made from apples that had fallen on the ground. Its scientist said those apples may have come in contact with fertilizer and, since the cider was not pasteurized, the bacteria were not killed.

Another thing to consider: Cow feed -- grain and hay -- are fertilized with animal waste. The National Cattlemen's Meat Association has formed a task force to assess that potential problem.

"You can't forget or remove the farm from this equation," said Marcy, the University of Arkansas researcher. "And you can't run these animals through a carwash before you slaughter them."

Meanwhile, money is being spent to put the new food-safety plan into place, with no guarantee that E. coli O157:H7 will be kept from reaching consumers. The USDA said the meat and poultry industry will spend \$ 357 million to implement the plan in its first three years, then \$ 120 million annually to maintain it.

It costs about \$ 24 to do a test for O157:H7, but the result isn't known for three to seven days. The USDA last week announced it had developed a new test, with an almost immediate result, but food scientists say it won't fill the bill. One researcher in Nevada said the new test detects O157:H7 only if 200 bacteria are found in a 1-gram sample. So far, in 15 years of testing, the largest concentration found in a gram has been 15 bacteria. Even smaller concentrations can cause severe illness or death.

The USDA took aim at O157:H7 in 1994, saying its presence in ground beef constituted adulteration. It did not hold trimmings from the cow's carcass to the same standard.

Beef trimmings, usually high in fat, are ground and blended with other cuts of beef to make hamburger. The trimmings give raw ground beef its marbling.

"There's where the disconnect is," said James L. Marsden, a distinguished professor of food science at Kansas State University and, like Marcy, a Food Safety Consortium researcher.

"Excluding the trimmings for testing represents a flaw in USDA's policy," Marsden said. "If the product is going to be ground [up], it needs to be tested. The way the enforcement is now is this: The company with the least to do with the process, gets the most punishment."

In April, the Food Marketing Institute, which represents 1,500 retail and wholesale stores, took the USDA to task, saying its inspection program was "ineffective as a safeguard for the public and wastes taxpayers money."

Tim Hammonds, the institute's president, said that the USDA's tests were worthless.

"The retail test results were not available before most of the ground beef in question has been purchased and eaten," he said. "This odd practice of continuing to concentrate testing where it is ineffective can only be explained as a desire to trumpet a public-health scare rather than preventing one."

#### Control of testing

Nevertheless, and despite the expense, industry has generally embraced the new food-safety plan, since it turns more control back to the manufacturer and weans the government away from its regulatory stance. The plan is built around more policing by the industry itself.

In fact, it was industry that determined higher cooking temperatures killed 0157:H7 in hamburger meat.

McDonald's Corp. had a brush with an E. coli outbreak in the early 1980s and turned to the University of Wisconsin for help. The subsequent study, paid for by McDonald's, recommended cooking meat to at least 155 degrees and prompted the company to redesign its grills to cook on both sides of the meat patty.

Head researcher Michael Doyle, now director of the Center for Food Safety and Quality Enhancement at the University of Georgia, said McDonald's had set a standard for meat safety. "This didn't happen overnight. It took a company looking ahead. And now the farm is next frontier; it must be looked at," Doyle said.

Today, McDonald's is still on the lookout for E. coli, saying it orders suppliers to do mandatory tests on every batch of meat it orders. If the meat doesn't pass the test, it's rejected.

Burger King, which was left burger-less Friday after the Hudson recall, also requires its suppliers to do 0157:H7 testing, but company officials would not say how often the tests are mandated.

Testing seems like a good idea, but James M. Jay, an adjunct professor at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas, says it is not practical for the government to say it can do it well.

Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, August 24, 1997

Jay, who has been a food microbiologist for 37 years, wrote the widely used Modern Food Microbiology in 1970. Updated five times, the book is the primary textbook in many college courses.

"The consumer groups are driving the need for change, but many of them don't know the difference between a microbe and a horse," Jay said.

"The people on the street think that there is some test in some gray-bearded professor's lab that the [USDA] knows about but won't use to detect E. coli 0157. There is no such device. Heat and irradiation are the only way to kill it."

Jay and others want to know why the USDA is withholding approval of irradiation, which has been on the table for two years. It has been proven to kill the 0157:H7 strain.

"We want to know why all they are doing is sitting on it," said James Reagan, the cattlemen's association's director of science and technology.

The government says it's still looking at its options.

GRAPHIC: Photos by Associated Press

Employees leave the Hudson Foods plant Friday in Columbus, Neb.

Patrick and Carol Marquez talk to reporters Friday after leaving the Hudson Foods plant in Columbus, Neb. Patrick Marquez, uncle to three small children he said are suffering the effects of E. coli poisoning, claimed to Hudson officials that the hamburger patties he is holding were tainted. Hudson Foods has recalled 25 million pounds of ground beef produced at the plant.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

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LEVEL 1 - 20 OF 69 STORIES

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Arkansas Democrat-Gazette

August 23, 1997, Saturday

SECTION: NEW; Pg. 1A

LENGTH: 1201 words

HEADLINE: Burger King, Wal-Mart pull Hudson beef

BYLINE: Andrea Harter and Russell Ray, Arkansas Democrat-Gazette

BODY:

Burger King and Wal-Mart Stores Inc. have removed all beef produced by Hudson Foods Inc. from restaurants and stores, and at least one brokerage firm has recommended that the Rogers-based company get out of the beef business.

A spokesman for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety Inspection Service said Friday that public health officials are trying to confirm a report that a woman died from eating a Hudson-produced hamburger patty tainted with the E. coli 0157:H7 bacteria. No details have been released about the woman.

"We are still checking on it," said spokesman Jacque Knight. "The coroner left a phone number and we are calling. It could have been a hoax. Sometimes that happens, but we are checking, like we do with all reports, to see if it's true."

The coroner stated that the woman ate a Hudson's previously frozen hamburger patty, Knight said.

The Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta said it had not received a confirmed death report as of Friday afternoon.

A Colorado health agency spokesman said that state has determined that 17 people became sick because of Hudson Foods products.

The Centers for Disease Control, in its weekly report, said Friday that the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment had tested specimens in 27 cases of E. coli 0157:H7 since June 1. According to the report, 15 people became sick between June 14 and July 14, and the strains of the bacteria were similar. Two of the 15 ate Hudson Foods ground beef products that tested positive for E. coli.

Of those 15 -- 11 males and four females -- five were hospitalized. They were between 3 and 76 years old.

Eight people recalled eating a Hudson Foods product and three others said they ate frozen hamburgers at least once in the seven days before they became ill.

At the USDA's request, Hudson Foods on Thursday agreed to close its Columbus, Mo., processing plant and recall 25 million pounds of ground beef produced at

the plant. Still, Hudson Foods maintains that the Nebraska processing plant is in compliance with all federal food safety standards.

"We agree and we support what the USDA recommended primarily because we want customers to be confident in Hudson products," said Hudson spokesman Robert Udowitz. "Even though we know all the proper safeguards are in check at the plant, the proper thing to do was to make sure the plant is perfectly clean and work with the USDA to get it open as quickly as possible."

The beef recall is the largest in U.S. history. Federal investigators suspect the meat may have been contaminated with the potentially fatal strain of E. coli bacteria.

Federal investigators found that hamburger patties produced June 6 were made from day-old meat from June 5, which contained the harmful microbe. Mixing day-old meat with fresh supplies is an acceptable practice as long as the meat is stored properly, said Melvin Hunt, a professor of animal science and a member of the federally funded Food Safety Consortium.

"I don't think that is an unusual practice," Hunt said. "Lots of people in the industry will probably combine some previous days' work with the following day."

USDA officials have said mixing day-old meat with fresh supplies doesn't violate federal regulations, but they don't consider it an acceptable practice.

In a letter given Friday to employees who work at the Nebraska plant, Hudson Foods executives said the plant shutdown was the company's only option, which was "clearly in the best interest of all concerned." The plant employs 230 people.

"From the very beginning, we never believed that any contamination originated in this plant," James T. "Red" Hudson, chairman and founder of the company, wrote. "Others now seem to have arrived at the same conclusion."

The outbreak began in June when a Pueblo, Colo., man thought he became ill from eating a hamburger patty from his freezer, said Cindy Parmenter, a spokesman for the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. The man took a frozen patty to health officials, which ultimately led to Thursday's 25-million-pound recall.

Thursday, Parmenter said health officials confirmed the 17th Colorado case of illness from the E. coli strain. All the cases, she said, were linked to frozen Hudson hamburger patties bought at Safeway and Sam's Stores.

Colorado has one of only 11 state laboratories in the nation equipped to perform the DNA testing necessary to distinguish among E. coli strains.

Earlier this week, Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman sent a so-called SWAT team of federal inspectors to the Columbus plant. Skip Rutherford, another Hudson Foods spokesman, said there were no USDA inspectors at the plant Friday other than one compliance officer from the Food and Drug Administration.

"I believe they left yesterday," Rutherford said. "I don't think they've been here today."

Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, August 23, 1997

USDA investigators are still trying to identify the source of contamination. Thursday, Glickman called the outbreak "contained." All Hudson beef products that bear the establishment code 13569 should be returned to stores for a refund.

Investment firm Merrill Lynch suggested Friday that Hudson Foods, the nation's third-largest publicly held poultry company, may be better off getting out of beef processing and focusing solely on poultry production.

"Hudson Foods is an excellent processor, but their strength is really in poultry," said Leonard Teitelbaum, an analyst who follows Hudson Foods for Merrill Lynch. "The move into the beef part of the business was at the urging of large food-service customers who really wanted Hudson to be involved because of their reliability."

Burger King restaurants removed all Hudson-produced beef from its restaurants, according to a written statement from Burger King's corporate headquarters in Miami. The statement also said that there hasn't been any evidence of unsafe beef in company restaurants.

Two Burger King restaurants in Fayetteville went part of the lunch hour Friday without offering hamburgers to its customers. As of Friday afternoon, both restaurants were serving burgers, using beef from a supplier in Missouri. The office manager at Burger King's corporate office in Springdale wouldn't identify the new supplier.

Lynn Holman, manager of a Burger King in Arkadelphia, said she had received a handful of inquiries from customers.

"I had a guy call me here and he said, 'Hey, I just came through there and then I heard about this,' and he said, 'Should I be worried?' And I said, 'Well, I'll tell you what. I just ate a Whopper an hour ago and I'm not one bit concerned.' And he said, 'Can I call you tomorrow and see if you get sick?'" Holman said.

Burger King restaurant managers in Hot Springs and Conway declined to answer questions.

The initial recall grew from 20,000 pounds Aug. 12 to 1.2 million pounds Aug. 15. In an "abundance of caution" and at the request of the USDA, Hudson increased the recall to 25 million pounds.

Information for this article was contributed by Danny Shameer of the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: August 26, 1997

LEVEL 1 - 21 OF 69 STORIES

Copyright 1997 The Cincinnati Enquirer  
The Cincinnati Enquirer

August 23, 1997, Saturday, EAST ZONE

SECTION: NEWS (WIRE, PAGE 1), Pg. A04

LENGTH: 373 words

HEADLINE: E. coli proves hard for science to quell

BYLINE: HEATHER DEWAR

SOURCE: Knight-Ridder News Service

DATELINE: WASHINGTON

BODY:

In spite of meat recalls, better tests and stepped up inspections, the federal government cannot ensure Americans' food is free of dangerous bacteria. And experts say it probably will never be able to.

Scientists cannot keep up with the disease-causing toxin that killed three Oregon toddlers in 1993 and sickened at least 15 Coloradans this summer. The toxin is carried by the common E. coli bacterium, which seems to be developing new forms faster than scientists can develop tests to trace them or treatments to stop them.

The toxin surfaced in ground meat again this summer and is at least 10 times more potent than other common food-borne diseases. A tiny amount can cause a nasty bout of intestinal illness - as well as kidney failure, brain damage and even death in about one out of every 4,000 people stricken.

So the bottom line for shoppers remains the same as it was in Roman times: Buyer, beware.

Under pressure from Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman, one meat-packing plant took steps this week to recall suspect frozen hamburger patties and overhaul its procedures.

But scientists at the CDC say none of this will get at the source of the problem: meat already tainted before it reached the plant with a strain of E. coli, named 0157:H7.

And that strain is only one of E. coli's dangerous forms.

Scientists did not know that in 1982, when they began work on tests that can quickly identify E. coli 0157:H7 in people and in food. About a year ago, they succeeded. New tests, not yet widely used in industry, can spot the strain in about eight hours, said researcher David Atcheson of Tufts University-New England Medical Center.

The scientists were fast, but the disease was faster, Mr. Atcheson said. He and others have identified about 60 more varieties of E. coli the new tests don't find, and they too carry the toxin.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: August 25, 1997

LEVEL 1 - 43 OF 69 STORIES

Copyright 1997 The Omaha World-Herald Company  
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August 22, 1997, Friday SUNRISE EDITION

SECTION: NEWS; Pg. 10

LENGTH: 1005 words

HEADLINE: Hudson Says Beef Plant Is High-Tech as It Gets A Look Inside Hudson  
About the Plant

BYLINE: JOHN TAYLOR

SOURCE: WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

DATELINE: Columbus, Neb.

BODY:

"You can see the operation, how neat and clean it is," Norbert E. Woodhams, an executive of Hudson Foods Inc., said this week as he led visitors through the company's ground-beef processing plant.

"It's pretty straightforward," he said. "That's why we're very confident that the problem is an outside problem."

The problem referred to by Woodhams, president of the Hudson Specialty Foods Division, was the recall last week of more than 1.2 million pounds of ground beef produced in a three-day period at the plant. The U.S. Agriculture Department said the meat could be contaminated with E. coli O157:H7, a potentially deadly bacteria.

The recall was boosted Thursday to 25 million pounds, and Hudson voluntarily shut down production after an announcement by U.S. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman that USDA officials had found that the plant had a practice of using leftover raw meat from one day in the next day's production.

The investigation was prompted by reports that 16 people in Colorado who became ill from E. coli bacteria had eaten beef processed at the plant. The number was raised to 20 Thursday.

Glickman said Thursday that the outbreak had been "contained."

Woodhams said the company believes the meat was contaminated by meat from an outside supplier. He and other executives say the procedures used at the plant, as well as the company's food-handling safeguards, make the facility one of the best in the nation.

The 100,000-square-foot Hudson plant was built for \$ 32 million and opened in January 1995. The Arkansas company is primarily known for its poultry operations; the Columbus plant is the firm's only raw-beef processor.

Hudson officials said the Columbus site was chosen because 25 percent of all U.S. beef supply is produced within 100 miles. James Hudson, company chairman, said that the plant has used beef from Australia in the past, but

The Cincinnati Enquirer, August 23, 1997

Because of gaps in testing, handling and cooking remain crucial to food safety.

In the case of meat that's pretty easy to do. Cooking tainted meat to 160 degrees Fahrenheit kills the toxin.

But uncooked foods like lettuce, juice, cider, alfalfa sprouts and radish sprouts have also caused disease outbreaks, and scientists aren't so sure how to prevent those illnesses.

LOAD-DATE: August 25, 1997

Copyright 1997 The Omaha World-Herald Company  
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August 23, 1997, Saturday BULLDOG EDITION

SECTION: NEWS; Pg. 2

LENGTH: 629 words

HEADLINE: Nelson: Beef's Image Not Permanently Hurt

BYLINE: JOHN TAYLOR

SOURCE: WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

BODY:

Gov. Nelson said Friday that it was too early to assess the economic damage to the beef industry caused by the recall of 25 million pounds of ground beef from a Columbus, Neb., plant.

However, he did say the damage is not likely to be permanent.

The governor said that while the U.S. Department of Agriculture's action in the closing of the Hudson Foods Inc. plant may be severe, it will reassure the public of the safety of food produced in Nebraska and elsewhere.

Nelson made his comments during a telephone press conference from the Renaissance Hotel in Sao Paulo, Brazil, where he and 13 Nebraska business representatives were on a trade mission.

In requiring Hudson to change its record-keeping process and some of its processing procedures, Nelson said, the USDA "should reaffirm the belief of Americans that our food quality and process of quality and safety continue to be at a higher level than anywhere in the world."

Hudson closed its Columbus plant Thursday for an indefinite period and increased its recall of ground beef to 25 million pounds, all produced from June 4 through Thursday.

While the shutdown was voluntary, it was done at the strong suggestion of the USDA, which said it found flaws in the company's processing methods and record-keeping.

Nelson said he had talked by telephone Friday morning with Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman and Hudson Chairman James Hudson.

"Secretary Glickman was very clear to me that this was not a situation that should result in panic," Nelson said.

"This is not like the Jack-in-the-Box problem of several years ago. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's response is more immediate and much stronger today than at that time, and that's (why) there should be a good deal of confidence gained in the system at this time."

Omaha World-Herald, August 23, 1997

A virulent strain of E. coli bacteria traced to undercooked hamburgers at Jack-in-the-Box restaurants killed several children in the Pacific Northwest in 1993 and sickened hundreds of other people.

Nelson expressed sympathy for the Hudson company and said he was pleased that the company has continued to pay the wages of the 230 workers at the closed plant.

"It's very clear that there were no violations of law or regulations," the governor said. "There is a sanitation question that comes out in favor of the company. It's a clean operation."

Nelson noted that Hudson and the USDA have said the meat contaminated with E. coli bacteria came from a supplier.

The USDA said E. coli O157:H7, a potentially deadly bacteria, sickened 20 people, all in Colorado, who ate ground beef processed at the Columbus plant.

"No one wants to get caught in a hailstorm without a hat, and it strikes me that Hudson is somewhat in this position," Nelson said. "They are the target of the action, obviously, but may not be the cause of the action."

He said he had offered the company any assistance it will need in getting the plant back in operation. He said he did not know when the plant could resume processing.

Nelson also expressed hope that Hudson and one of its biggest customers, Burger King, would resume their business relationship. Burger King has removed all Hudson-processed beef patties from its restaurants.

Meanwhile, U.S. Rep. Bill Barrett, R-Neb., in whose district the plant is located, praised the company's record.

"I'm not in public relations for Hudson, but it's a new facility with modern, state-of-the-art equipment, and they've never had a problem before," he said in a statement.

"If it turns out the E. coli didn't originate at the plant, but at one of the suppliers, as has been indicated, then we need to recognize this is a problem that could crop up anywhere."

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: August 26, 1997

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August 23, 1997, Saturday SUNRISE EDITION

SECTION: EDITORIAL; Pg. 14

LENGTH: 535 words

HEADLINE: Even Most Modern Food Plant Must Employ Keener Controls

BODY:

The Columbus, Neb., meat-processing plant owned by Hudson Foods Inc. seems an unlikely candidate for a tainted-food incident. But 25 million pounds of frozen hamburger patties shipped by the plant are being recalled by the federal government because of the possibility that it has been contaminated by the E. coli bacteria.

Only 2 1/2 years old, the facility appears state-of-the-art. Its work areas resemble the surgical wing of a hospital, with bright lights and stainless steel fixtures. Workers wear head coverings, masks, white coats and gloves and wash their boots as they enter. Employees who don't follow hand-washing rules are reprimanded.

The meat is handled by automated equipment. Two of the three shifts each day are for production, an employee said. The third is strictly for cleaning work areas and equipment.

But even such a facility finds itself the subject of by far the largest food recall in history. This illustrates the insidious nature of food-borne illnesses - and the need for government and industry to be even more vigilant.

It hasn't been proved that contamination exists in all the patties that are being recalled. But the strain of the E. coli bacterium that made 20 people in Colorado sick from eating Hudson beef is too dangerous to take chances.

Government inspectors theorize that the bacteria entered the Columbus plant in beef from a supplier. The government refused to make public the names of the seven suppliers.

Hudson, despite its shiny processing areas and its rules of cleanliness, made things harder on itself. Government inspectors discovered that the company saved meat patties that were improperly formed on one day and recycled the meat in the next day's run. For that reason, there could be no assurance that the contamination hadn't spread from one day's production to the next.

Hudson's records were of little help, the government said. Records weren't sufficiently detailed to trace specific quantities of meat through the production process. In addition, the inspectors said, Hudson's E. coli tests weren't conducted as often as they should have been.

That's why the U.S. secretary of agriculture, Dan Glickman of Kansas, said it was necessary to recall all the meat shipped from the Columbus plant this summer. The bacteria were present in meat that was processed June 5. Written records kept at the Columbus plant could provide no assurance that the

bacteria were eliminated after that date.

Glickman's action, we hope, will assure buyers of Nebraska-produced beef by demonstrating that considerable effort will be made to keep the product safe. The recall could temporarily damage the image of the beef industry. It reminds the public that a potentially fatal disease can be contracted by eating contaminated meat - and that even a state-of-the-art plant might not detect the presence of the bacteria on shipments it receives from suppliers.

The best that can be hoped is that, in responding to it as they have, both government and industry will learn how to tighten and refine their procedures so that the possibility of another outbreak will be virtually eliminated.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: August 26, 1997

LEVEL 1 - 26 OF 69 STORIES

Copyright 1997 Capital City Press  
The Advocate (Baton Rouge, La.)

August 22, 1997 Friday METRO EDITION

SECTION: NEWS; Pg. 8A

LENGTH: 376 words

HEADLINE: Neb. plant closed; meat recall growing

SOURCE: AP

DATELINE: WASHINGTON

BODY:

WASHINGTON - A Nebraska plant that produced possibly hazardous hamburger patties has been closed and is recalling an estimated 25 million pounds of the product.

The latest recall estimate represented a huge leap in the possible scope of the contamination.

E. coli bacteria contamination originated outside the plant, at the slaughterhouse, but the massive recall is needed because of problems with meat handling, record keeping and safety testing at the operation, Agriculture Department officials said Thursday.

The Columbus, Neb., plant will not reopen until the company has adopted "far more stringent safety standards that we have specifically laid out for them based on what we have found in our investigation," Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said.

The announcement means the recall is growing about 20-fold from last Friday. Hudson Foods said in a statement that it ordered the recall "out of an abundance of caution and to restore the public confidence. "

Glickman said fewer than 20 people are known to have gotten sick from the tainted meat.

"We continue to monitor the situation very closely, but all the evidence at this point indicates that we have contained the outbreak," he said.

Recalls were announced last week, first with 20,000 pounds of meat, then another 20,000, and on Friday it became 1.2 million pounds.

The initial Hudson recall began after health officials in Colorado traced the illnesses of more than a dozen people to hamburger patties they ate in early June.

The USDA has evidence that the contamination occurred not in the plant but at one or more of the slaughterhouses that supply it, said Tom Billy, administrator of USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service.

The Advocate (Baton Rouge, La.), August 22, 1997

Officials are looking at the seven slaughterhouses that were known to have supplied the plant on June 5, he said.

They are "now satisfied no indication of contamination occurred in the plant itself," Billy said.

Glickman said the main reason the recall is being expanded was that USDA officials on Thursday morning discovered problems in the plant's procedures. Specifically, he said, investigators discovered the plant had a practice of using leftover raw meat from one day in the next day's production.

LOAD-DATE: August 22, 1997

LEVEL 1 - 27 OF 69 STORIES

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August 22, 1997, Friday

SECTION: NEW; Pg. 1A

LENGTH: 1310 words

HEADLINE: Hudson closes plant; recall grows 20-fold

BYLINE: Andrea Harter, Arkansas Democrat-Gazette

BODY:

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's largest recall grew by more than 20-fold Thursday with the announced shutdown of a Nebraska plant and condemnation of 25 million pounds of raw meat produced by Hudson Foods Inc.

Late Thursday, a spokesman for the USDA's Food Safety Inspection Service, told the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette that one death had been reported. The spokesman said a coroner called the agency's health hot line to report a woman's death because of the E. coli strain of bacteria.

The spokesman said the death appeared to be linked to Hudson's burgers, which are sold frozen to restaurants and grocery stores. The spokesman would not reveal the woman's identity.

The plant in Columbus, Neb., will be closed indefinitely until the USDA says it's safe to produce meat there again. The USDA does not have the power to close plants -- only to withdraw inspectors.

Hudson agreed to the shutdown recommendation.

"These are nonnegotiable proposals," Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said. "The plant will not reopen until they are all met."

The recall affects about 25 million pounds -- all in frozen ground beef patties, the USDA said.

The original recall, first at 20,000 pounds and then expanded to 1.2 million pounds, was announced a week ago after Colorado Public Health officials said meat from Hudson contained the deadly E. coli 0157:H7 bacteria. The government said 16 people are ill from ingesting the bacteria, which can injure a person's kidneys and cause death.

The woman who died was not from Colorado, the USDA spokesman said.

A Hudson lawyer said the company had not been notified of any deaths.

For its part, the Rogers-based company -- best known as the third-largest publicly traded poultry products maker in the country -- pledged full

Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, August 22, 1997

cooperation with federal officials and thanked the 230 workers at the Columbus plant who are temporarily not working, but receiving full pay. The modern plant could be closed permanently, but no decision has been announced.

Hudson Foods Chairman and founder James T. "Red" Hudson said the company was "acting out of an abundance of caution and to restore the public's confidence."

All products from the company with the establishment code 13569 should be returned to stores for a refund. None of the meat should be eaten. Only ground meat processed at that plant is affected by the recall.

Glickman called the outbreak "contained."

Still, he said, production won't resume at the plant "until far more stringent safety standards are met." The Columbus plant accounted for about \$ 91 million in sales during the last fiscal year, or 6.6 percent of the company's \$ 1.4 billion total, Hudson said.

Hudson, in a statement, said he believes the contamination came from outside the plant. The plant is a further processing plant, meaning instead of killing animals on site, it buys the meat from suppliers. None of the company's suppliers has been named.

The USDA has refused to clear Hudson as the contamination source, but food microbiologists and production sanitation officials said Thursday that the organism had to come from a slaughter plant. This particular type of E. coli is found in the intestines of cattle and can infect beef when the cow's entrails are removed. It is colorless and odorless and can't be detected by generic E. coli tests mandated by the government.

Glickman said that while the recall is voluntary, he was ready to withhold the USDA's approval stamp until the problems were corrected. The government's approval stamp, which states that raw food has been inspected by federal workers, doesn't guarantee food is free of bacteria, only that the meat was processed in a safe manner. The government is overhauling its inspection processes and turning more control over to companies under a phased-in three-year plan.

He said: "Given the quantities of food, it certainly could have been far worse." Glickman praised his so-called SWAT team of investigators who were dispatched to Nebraska and to Hudson's Arkansas headquarters. He said teams worked through the night to deliver information needed to close the plant.

USDA officials said they were disturbed by a practice at the plant of including meat left over from one day's production in the next day's product. Record-keeping procedures were also inconsistent, they said.

The practice is common in the meat and poultry industry and is known as "rework." USDA did not specify the problems it had with Hudson's rework operations, but said that product produced on June 6 included meat left over from June 5.

Thomas J. Billy, administrator of the department's Food Safety and Inspection Service, said it was impossible to tell where the chain might have ended, so the decision was made to close the plant. Seven unnamed suppliers to Hudson, which

Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, August 22, 1997

are also USDA inspected, are being scrutinized.

Hudson shares fell 19 cents to close at \$ 15.13 after Glickman's announcement, with 494,700 shares traded on the New York Stock Exchange. That is more than twice the volume normally traded; Hudson recorded an average daily trading volume of 178,551 during the last three months.

Glickman used the occasion to point to his lack of authority in ordering recalls on his own. Glickman, charged by President Clinton to remake the USDA's food inspection and safety programs, said he would ask Congress for legislation granting him recall authority.

"I agree wholeheartedly with the consumer groups" who say USDA should be able to order recalls, Glickman said.

Glickman sent additional inspectors to the plant to determine the source of the contamination and to find out why it took the company three days to reveal the extent of the problem. Hudson Foods initially said it recalled 20,000 pounds. Two days later, the figure was raised to 40,000 pounds and a day after that, the USDA pegged it at 1.2 million.

USDA inspectors are checking with Hudson customers -- including Burger King Corp., Boston Market, Wal-Mart Stores Inc. and Safeway Inc. -- to make sure all suspect meat is returned, Glickman said.

Boston Chicken Inc., parent of Boston Market, said all ground beef processed by Hudson Foods' Nebraska plant has already been removed from its stores.

Boston Chicken Inc. said the recall will affect about 40 percent of its more than 1,100 stores -- not the 60 percent it estimated earlier -- which use the ground beef to make the company's meatloaf entree.

"About 60 percent of our stores will continue to have meatloaf because it's made with ground beef from other suppliers," said Jeff Beckman, spokesman for the Golden, Colo.-based chain. Stores won't be affected by the recall in Southern California, Washington, Oregon, New Mexico, Colorado, Idaho, Utah, Wyoming, Florida, Texas, Arizona and Minnesota.

"We're getting additional product from other suppliers to fill in the interim," said Beckman.

He declined to say whether Boston Chicken Inc. would continue doing business with Hudson Foods in the future.

Hudson Foods sells chicken, turkey, beef and pork under the Delightful Farms, Pierre, and Schweigert brand names.

Glickman said the inspectors would be looking at other Hudson plants as well, "to make sure that these same kinds of problems, particularly the problems with the record-keeping that we have encountered here, do not exist."

Wal-Mart Stores Inc., another purchaser of Hudson products for its superstores and Sam's Club stores, said all of Hudson's frozen hamburger meat was pulled from the stores last week. No Hudson Foods frozen ground beef patties have been sold at Wal-Mart Supercenters or Sam's Clubs since Aug. 13.

Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, August 22, 1997

Information for this article was contributed by Bloomberg News.

GRAPHIC: Associated Press

Workers at the Hudson Foods plant in Columbus, Neb., process ground beef Monday. The plant is suspected in an outbreak of E. coli contamination and is shutting down until more safety standards are in effect.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: August 26, 1997