

2/9/11 (Item 2 from file: 582)
DIALOG(R)File 582:Augusta (GA) Chronicle
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09234012 (THIS IS THE FULLTEXT)

USDA

CLOSES

PLANT

DEPARTMENT SHUTS DOWN NEBRASKA BEEF MAKER THAT POSSIBLY MADE
CONTAMINATED

HAMBURGER PATTIES

Los Angeles Times

Augusta Chronicle, FINAL ED, P A12

Friday, August 22, 1997

JOURNAL CODE: AG LANGUAGE: ENGLISH RECORD TYPE: FULLTEXT

SECTION HEADING: NEWS

Word Count: 527

TEXT:

Vastly expanding what was already the largest food recall in U.S. history, a Nebraska plant that packaged possibly tainted hamburger patties is ordering back an estimated 25 million pounds of the product and will close indefinitely, Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said Thursday.

Hudson Foods Inc., owner of the Columbus, Neb., plant, agreed to vastly broaden the scope of the recall after federal inspectors uncovered production practices suggesting that more frozen beef might have been contaminated with E. coli bacteria than originally suspected.

Last week, after a link was made with 16 Colorado cases of E. coli food poisoning, Hudson Foods announced recalls over successive days, first of 20,000 pounds, then an additional 20,000 and, on Friday, a record 1.2 million pounds. Thursday's vault to 25 million pounds - or 100 million burgers - makes this by far the largest food recall that government officials could remember. That amount falls just shy of a typical day's U.S. production of ground beef.

The Hudson products - all bearing establishment No. 13569 - were distributed to grocery stores, fast-food chains and warehouse outlets, including Safeway, Sam's Clubs (owned by Wal-Mart), Burger King and Boston Market. Department of Agriculture officials suggested that consumers check their freezers for any Hudson products and return them to the retailer for a refund.

Hudson, based in Rogers, Ark., said in a statement it was suspending

operations "out of an abundance of caution and to restore the public confidence."

The plant will not reopen, Mr. Glickman said at a hastily arranged Washington news conference, 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."

Among other discoveries by Department of Agriculture investigators was that the plant had on two successive days packaged beef left over from the previous day's production, because of the breakdown of a packing machine. This proved problematic because the beef from the first of those three days - June 5 - was later shown to contain *Escherichia coli* O157:H7, which can cause severe, bloody diarrhea and can be fatal. That problem was made worse by inadequate bookkeeping, which made it tough to track particular lots of meat, and by possibly unsatisfactory testing, said Thomas J. Billy, administrator of the agency's Food Safety and Inspection Service.

Although the USDA has no specific prohibition on such a practice, meat plants typically finish packaging the entire supply on a given day, Mr. Billy said.

The harsh action was called for, officials said, even though they have evidence that the contamination occurred not in the plant but at one or more of the slaughterhouses that supply it.

Technically, the Hudson action is described as a voluntary recall. But Mr. Glickman used the opportunity to urge Congress to pass legislation granting the agency the authority to mandate food recalls on its own.

During the news conference, he said "one of the biggest loopholes" was the federal government's lack of power to order recalls.

"When Congress comes back from recess," Mr. Glickman said, "I will have ready for them legislation that gives me the authority to order recalls as well as to impose civil fines."

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COMPANY NAMES (Dialog Generated): Boston Market ; Burger King ; Department of Agriculture ; Hudson Foods Inc ; Neb ; Safeway ; Wal Mart

2/9/15 (Item 2 from file: 929)
DIALOG(R)File 929: Albuquerque Newspapers
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00156919 (THIS IS THE FULLTEXT)

Burger Kings replace beef after huge national recall

Patricia Guthrie TRIBUNE REPORTER

Albuquerque Tribune, P A1

August 23, 1997

JOURNAL CODE: AT LANGUAGE: English RECORD TYPE: FULLTEXT

Word Count: 651

TEXT:

Its restaurants in Albuquerque are once again selling burgers thanks to a new shipment of meat.

Burger Kings in Albuquerque were back to whipping up Whoppers after the fast-food chain decided to hold the beef in one of the largest food recalls ever to hit New Mexico.

About a quarter of Burger King restaurants throughout the country, including the 25 franchises in Albuquerque, voluntarily stopped serving hamburgers Friday after beef supplier Hudson Foods announced it was shutting a plant and recalling 25 million pounds of possibly tainted beef.

The Burger Kings barren of beef were reduced to selling chicken and fish sandwiches at a lower cost until about 3 p.m. Friday, when a fresh shipment of ground beef from California arrived, said Katie Kelly, a spokeswoman for the local Burger King franchises.

The burger business dwindled rapidly after word spread of the Whopper stopper. Business was still fairly slow by 7 p.m. Friday, Kelly said.

Although she did not have exact cost figures, Kelly estimated that the loss of business Friday amounted to thousands of dollars.

"But the company felt that it was worth losing the business just to keep our customers safe and to make sure they know that we care about what we serve," she said.

Kelly also said that she had received reports of irate customers angry that at least for about four hours Friday they could not have their burgers their way or any way.

"But I would say that 80 percent of all our customers understood and

complimented us for our actions," she said.

None of Burger King's meat was contaminated with the E. coli bacteria, Kelly said.

"We just wanted our customers to know Burger King is a safe place to eat and be able to come in here with no worries," she said.

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 Hudson 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. "We've ordered all our 23 field offices around the state out to all restaurants and suppliers to tell them all Hudson ground beef has been recalled," said Tony Smith, food-quality program coordinator for the New Mexico Environment Department.

It was not immediately known how many pounds of beef that may add up to.

Recalls were announced last week, first with 20,000 pounds of meat, then another 20,000, and on Friday it became 25 million pounds.

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

Earlier this month, when the recall was limited to 20,000 pounds of beef from specific lot numbers, none of the recalled beef was found at New Mexico's restaurants and stores, Smith said.

"We found Hudson burgers then, but none with the specific lot numbers being recalled," Smith said. "We swept through all the Sam's Clubs, Wal-Mart and other wholesale outlets, as well as Boston Market, Burger King, Safeway and other locations, and we didn't find any of the specific burgers.

"But now that it's all going back, we know who sells it, so we're returning to the store and telling them it's all being recalled."

A spokeswoman for Boston Market said the company does not use Hudson beef products in the meatloaf sold at its New Mexico outlets.

No illnesses linked to the ground-beef contamination have been found in New Mexico, health officials said.

Two cases of suspected E. coli in Farmington last week turned out to be something else, said Dr. David Keller, Department of Health epidemiologist.

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 undercooked burgers.

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COMPANY NAMES (Dialog Generated): Agriculture Department ; Boston Market ; Burger King ; Clubs ; Department of Health ; Hudson Foods ; New Mexico Environment Department ; Safeway ; Wal Mart

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DIALOG(R)File 146:Washington Post Online
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4141193

Retailers Try To Assure Public That Beef Is Safe USDA Investigating Plant
For Source of Contamination

The Washington Post, August 23, 1997, FINAL Edition

By: Martha M. Hamilton, Washington Post Staff Writer

Section: A SECTION, p. A01

Story Type: News National

Line Count: 83 Word Count: 917

Fast-food chains and grocers stepped up efforts yesterday to reassure consumers of the safety of hamburgers, meatloaf and beef patties despite the recall of 25 million pounds of ground beef because of concerns the meat may be contaminated with a potentially deadly bacteria.

At the same time, U.S. Department of Agriculture investigators combed through records and interviewed workers at Hudson Foods Inc.'s Columbus, Neb., processing plant in an effort to determine how contamination might have occurred, and whether the tainted meat may have come from one of Hudson's suppliers.

Hudson officials yesterday defended the company's safety record and said the firm would cooperate fully with the USDA's investigation.

The recall started Aug. 12, when Hudson voluntarily recalled 20,000 pounds of frozen ground beef patties that had been implicated in 16 cases of food poisoning in Colorado caused by the E. coli bacterium. The USDA later determined that 1.2 million pounds of meat should be recalled as a precaution and sent a team of inspectors to the plant. The inspectors found a number of problems, including the practice of using leftover meat in the next day's operations. That prompted Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman on Thursday to make a "nonnegotiable" recommendation that Hudson close the plant, and dramatically expand the recall.

By yesterday, restaurants and grocery chains that once carried or used Hudson products said the meat had been removed. Boston Market, Burger King and Wal-Mart all said they had immediately removed the meat products that were subject to recall from their stores and were taking steps to find alternative suppliers.

Boston Market and Burger King, two of the largest fast-food chains that were Hudson customers, used the products in only some of their stores. In the Washington area, Boston Market customers were deprived of meatloaf

because the 40 percent of the company's stores that made meatloaf from ground beef processed by the shut-down plant included Maryland, Virginia and the District.

In the case of Burger King, 700 restaurants were forced to stop serving burgers, though none are in the Washington metropolitan area, where ground beef and hamburger patties came from another supplier, the fast-food chain's officials said. Safeway carried Hudson ground beef patties in some Denver division stores but no Maryland, Virginia or District stores carry the product.

Giant Food Inc. spokesman Mark Roeder said the company did not carry Hudson ground beef or patties but that it had found a small supply of frozen turkey roasts in some stores and "decided to go ahead and remove it out of an abundance of caution."

Shoppers Food Warehouse carries some Hudson poultry products in its delicatessen areas, said spokesman Lou Davis. But he said that those products were not affected by the recall.

The USDA has said that consumers should examine all Hudson frozen preformed beef patties for the number 13569 printed inside the USDA inspection seal and return those product to the place of purchase.

Grocery shoppers and fast-food patrons coped. Silver Spring real estate agent Phil Styles bought a ham sandwich yesterday at the Boston Market on North Frederick Avenue in Gaithersburg. He said that he usually doesn't eat much beef, but that the Hudson recall has caused him to give it up completely for now. "It'll be awhile before I eat anything that's ground up again," he said.

Hudson officials said yesterday that the processing plant that was closed accounted for \$91 million in sales, or about 6.6 percent of the Arkansas company's overall sales of \$1.4 billion. "We closed the plant to make sure the public is confident about the product, and we're working with USDA to reopen it as quickly as possible," said Robert Udowitz, a company spokesman.

Udowitz said the company will pick up the ground beef in question from the retailers' warehouses and destroy it according to USDA specifications. "The recalled meat is going to various cold storages until the company decides on the exact plan to destroy it. It's not going for dog food or anything of that sort."

Initial confusion over how much beef should be recalled resulted from a miscommunication when USDA requested information, the company said, noting

that a USDA inspector is on site daily at the Nebraska plant.

The company said yesterday that it is continuing to pay the plant's 230 workers while it is closed. Workers and townspeople in Columbus rallied around the company yesterday, saying they expected it would be exonerated.

The plant had been checked three times by the USDA and found to be free of contamination by E. coli, a USDA spokesman said. E. coli O157:H7 can cause severe abdominal cramps, bloody diarrhea and dehydration. It is especially dangerous to small children, the elderly and persons with compromised immune systems.

Hudson Foods has been involved in one previous voluntary recall in 1995. In that instance 3.9 million pounds of ground raw turkey processed by the company's Springfield, Mo., plant was recalled because it contained more than the allowable amount of bone. The recall came after two consumers reported finding bone in packages of ground turkey and a subsequent USDA laboratory examination found small pieces of bone in unopened packages.

On July 22, OSHA proposed penalties of \$332,500 against the company for what the agency called "willful, serious and repeat violations of worker safety requirements." The company has contested the penalty and disputes the agency's contentions on the alleged safety violations, including minor violations at the Nebraska plant.

Staff writers Kirstin Downey-Grimsley and Peter McKay contributed to this story.

ORGANIZATION NAME: HUDSON FOODS INC.; AGRICULTURE DEPARTMENT
DESCRIPTORS: Meat; Poisoning; Consumer protection and rights; Food products industry; Public health laws (eg, Food, Restaurants); Investigations and probes; Nebraska; Recalls; Food stores

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DIALOG(R)File 146:Washington Post Online
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4141031

Burger Recall Grows To 25 Million Pounds Nebraska Plant Shut
The Washington Post, August 22, 1997, FINAL Edition
By: Rick Weiss, Caroline E. Mayer, Washington Post Staff Writer
Section: A SECTION, p. A01
Story Type: News National
Line Count: 124 Word Count: 1369

A major meat processing company already under federal investigation for its recent distribution of tainted hamburgers 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 yesterday.

The enormous nationwide recall, the largest by far in U.S. history, was a "non-negotiable" recommendation from the government, Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said. It was put to the plant's owner, Hudson Foods Inc. of Rogers, Ark., after federal inspectors uncovered evidence that the company's meat processing, bacterial testing and bookkeeping procedures are inadequate to assure that its products are 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 upon 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 yesterday, 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 beef products are labeled with "establishment number" 13569.

The company's burgers are carried by such national chains as Burger King, Wal-Mart, Boston Market, Sam's Club and Safeway. Most restaurants and grocery stores in the Washington area do not carry Hudson beef, and those that did said yesterday they had stopped selling the product.

Burger King announced that 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. None of those restaurants are in the Washington area.

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," Jeff Beckman, Boston Market's public relations director, said an hour after the 2:30 p.m. news conference.

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

Officials at the Defense Commissary Agency, which supplies the 300 military commissaries around the world, including eight in the Washington area, issued a notice ordering the "offending Hudson beef products" 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.

Officials at major local supermarket chains, including Giant Food, Safeway, Shoppers Food Warehouse and Super Fresh, all said their stores did not carry Hudson beef patties.

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

Warehouse stores, including Cosco Wholesale (formerly called Price Club) and BJ's Warehouse Club, also said they did not stock Hudson's beef patties. However, the patties had been carried by Sam's Club, a division of Wal-Mart. Wal-Mart spokeswoman Betsy Reithemeyer said Wal-Mart officials pulled all Hudson ground beef off counter shelves last week.

Glickman said the department was moved to recommend closure of Hudson's Columbus, Neb., plant and a total recall after inspectors learned that the company had a practice of saving leftover raw meat not used in the burger-making operation on one day and adding it 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 is still under way, said USDA Inspector General Roger Viadero. That investigation was initiated after a USDA audit last week determined that 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 that 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.

Billy said Colorado public health officials and scientists at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta are looking into new cases of E. coli poisoning among members of two Colorado families who recently fell ill after eating hamburgers produced at the Hudson plant on June 16.

If DNA fingerprinting studies show a match between the disease-causing bacteria in those people and bacteria in hamburgers saved from the families' freezers, then the scope of contamination from the Hudson plant would be larger than previously recognized. The 16 cases that have been linked so far to Hudson were all tied to burgers produced earlier in the month.

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 to 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's return that would grant him the authority to order meat and poultry recalls and levy civil fines against companies that threaten the public health.

Consumers wanting more information about the recall were urged to call the toll-free USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-800-535-4555. Woteki said the hot line took a record 6,000 calls last weekend after the agency announced its expanded recall.

** Meat Safety Tips

The best way to eat meat safely is to cook it thoroughly, or make sure it has been cooked thoroughly when dining in restaurants, health experts say.

The simplest way to be certain that meat has been cooked sufficiently is to inspect the inside and make sure it is not red in the middle, according to the Agriculture Department.

The USDA recommends cooking red meat -- including ground beef -- to at least 160 degrees and poultry to 180 degrees. Large cuts such as pot roasts can be slightly pink in the middle if they have been cooked to at least 145 degrees, but the USDA recommends 170 degrees for well-done.

The agency strongly encourages use of a thermometer to check the temperature.

Simple cleanliness can cut the chance of illness from bacteria on food, according to the USDA. Hands and all surfaces that come in contact with raw meat should be washed.

NAMED PERSONS: GLICKMAN, DAN

ORGANIZATION NAME: AGRICULTURE DEPARTMENT; HUDSON FOODS INC.;
BURGER

KING CORP.; BOSTON MARKET; WAL-MART STORES INC. DEFENSE
COMMISSARY

AGENCY

DESCRIPTORS: Meat; Food; Poisoning; Food products industry; Public
health laws (eg, Food, Restaurants); Investigations and probes;

2/9/3 (Item 1 from file: 471)
DIALOG(R)File 471:New York Times Fulltext-90 Day
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03714361 826030970828

Food Safety's Waiting Weapon

Richard Rhodes; Richard Rhodes is the author of "Deadly Feasts: Tracking the Secrets of a Terrifying New Plague" and "The Making of the Atomic Bomb."

New York Times, Late Edition - Final ED, COL 01, P 31

Thursday August 28 1997

DOCUMENT TYPE: Newspaper; Op-Ed JOURNAL CODE: NYT LANGUAGE: English

RECORD TYPE: Fulltext SECTION HEADING: SECTA

Word Count: 754

TEXT:

MADISON, Conn. - It's a good rule of thumb that technological solutions work better than increased regulation. Before 1920, thousands of babies died annually in New York and other large American cities from drinking contaminated milk. The solution wasn't more Federal dairy inspectors or a merger of Government agencies. It was pasteurization.

The solution to the problem of food poisoning -- whether the food involved is hamburger, strawberries, raspberries, cider or some other product susceptible to bacterial contamination -- has been sitting on the shelf for most of 40 years while hundreds of thousands of Americans have been sickened and thousands have died. It is the equivalent of pasteurization, and its neglect is a disgrace.

The technology is food irradiation. The Army pioneered its development beginning in 1943, and it has since passed into commercial application in some 40 countries, including limited use in the United States.

Irradiation uses gamma rays from a solid radioactive source to disrupt the DNA of, and thus to kill, noxious bacteria, parasites, mold and fungus in and on agricultural products. Gamma rays are similar to microwaves and X-rays.

Irradiation doesn't make food radioactive, nor does it noticeably change taste, texture or appearance. Depending on dose and on whether the food is packaged to prevent recontamination, irradiation can retard spoilage, kill germs or even completely preserve. The World Health Organization, the American Medical Association and the American Veterinary Medical Association all endorse the process.

The Food and Drug Administration has approved irradiation of pork, poultry, fruits, vegetables, spices and grains, although its use remains limited. Most imported spices are preserved with irradiation. Tropical fruits like mango and papaya from Hawaii are treated to kill exotic pests. Irradiated chicken is served in hospitals in the Southeast. Astronauts

aboard the space shuttle eat irradiated food, including steak.

Food irradiation would have prevented the illnesses caused recently by contaminated hamburger from Hudson Foods and the several deaths linked to Jack in the Box restaurants in the Northwest in 1993. It could kill the salmonella that infects up to 60 percent of the poultry and eggs sold in the United States; the deadly mutant E. coli strain 0157:H7, which the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have characterized as a major emerging infectious disease, and such ugly stowaways as beef tapeworms, fish parasites and the nematodes that cause trichinosis in pork.

Yet the new meat inspection system now being phased in by the United States Department of Agriculture does not even mention, much less mandate, irradiation. Neither Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman nor the Food and Drug Administration invoked food irradiation as a solution to the Hudson Foods situation, preferring instead to press for destruction of 25 million pounds of meat that could have been made edible with the technique.

A petition for authorization to irradiate red meat has languished at the F.D.A. since 1994. Several states, including New York, have responded to pressure from citizen groups by either banning or imposing a moratorium on the sale of irradiated food without reviewing scientific evidence of the technology's safety and value.

Why the gap between promise and application? Because food irradiation -- like cancer treatment, medical diagnostics, sterilization of medical disposables, aircraft maintenance and many other technologies -- uses radioactivity, which Americans have been taught to fear. Commercial irradiators use metallic cesium-137 or cobalt-60 as sources of gamma radiation in heavily shielded processing plants; when the radioactive sources are not being used to sanitize food, they are stored safely underground.

Some anti-nuclear and environmental groups have campaigned against food irradiation, even imagining a conspiracy among the Food and Drug Administration, the World Health Organization and the nuclear power industry to use the process to dispose of nuclear waste.

Similarly fanatic resistance plagued the introduction of vaccination, water chlorination, pasteurization and fluoridation -- comparable technologies that have reduced disease and saved millions of lives. The unsupported fears of the Luddite opposition are making people suffer needlessly.

Mr. Glickman has said that the Hudson Foods case highlights the need to better educate the public on how to prepare food properly, but we can't all become sterile technicians at home. Thermometers won't protect us from E. coli-contaminated alfalfa sprouts.

Public health has been a primary responsibility of Government for more than a century. Inspection and testing alone, however responsibly applied, can never assure consumer safety where invisible pathogens are concerned.

Pasteurization saved the babies. Irradiation can save our food.

2/9/4 (Item 2 from file: 471)
DIALOG(R)File 471:New York Times Fulltext-90 Day
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For Safer Hamburgers

New York Times, Late Edition - Final ED, COL 01, P 18

Tuesday August 26 1997

DOCUMENT TYPE: Newspaper; Editorial JOURNAL CODE: NYT LANGUAGE:

English RECORD TYPE: Fulltext SECTION HEADING: SECTA

Word Count: 595

ABSTRACT:

Editorial says Federal Government must move swiftly to put new regulatory system in place to guard against future outbreaks of E coli contamination of meat (M)

TEXT:

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 as swiftly as it can 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 to recall 25 million pounds of meat -- the largest meat recall in United States 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, like cutting and grinding.

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.

Mr. Glickman should be encouraging meat processing plants, particularly the larger ones, 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 the good will of meat companies.

Hudson insists that the tainted meat had to come from one of its suppliers, and Agriculture officials say it is likely the meat was contaminated before reaching the plant. The Agriculture Department needs 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 now 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 in a worldwide food system.

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.

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DESCRIPTORS: Food Contamination and Poisoning; Editorials; Meat; E Coli (Bacteria); Sanitation; Regulation and Deregulation of Industry

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DIALOG(R)File 471:New York Times Fulltext-90 Day
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Agriculture Dept. Plans Hunt for Source of Tainted Beef

MICHAEL JANOFSKY

New York Times, Late Edition - Final ED, COL 01, P 7

Saturday August 23 1997

DOCUMENT TYPE: Newspaper JOURNAL CODE: NYT LANGUAGE: English

RECORD TYPE: Fulltext SECTION HEADING: SECT1

Word Count: 929

TEXT:

WASHINGTON, Aug. 22 - Over the next several days, Agriculture Department officials across the country will pore over mounds of paperwork and interview people in an effort to determine the source of the E. coli bacteria that led to this week's recall of 25 million pounds of ground beef.

But the officials acknowledge that their search will be hampered by one simple fact: For all their improved safeguards, they do not really know how bacteria get into the nation's food supply.

Most of the modernization has come in processing plants and slaughterhouses, where new Federal monitoring systems are to go into effect next year.

The officials also said scientists were still uncertain how animals -- before they are slaughtered -- become contaminated with bacteria like E. coli 0157:H7, a potentially deadly organism that was discovered this month in ground beef processed at a plant in Nebraska.

Some officials say that the Government has missed opportunities to develop a system to identify contaminated animals because of opposition from the powerful food industry, and inaction by agencies.

Referring to the various possible ways E. coli and other organisms enter an animal before it is killed, Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said in an interview, "We would like to expend more research resources on that."

On Thursday, the Agriculture Department announced that the plant, owned by Hudson Foods of Rogers, Ark., would suspend operations and recall 25 million pounds of ground beef that is possibly contaminated with the E. coli bacteria.

The recalled meat had been distributed as frozen hamburger patties to fast-food chains like Burger King, a subsidiary of Grand Metropolitan of Britain, and Boston Market and retail outlets like Wal-Mart Stores and Safeway supermarkets.

So far, the department has evidence that 16 people in Colorado became

ill because of the bacteria in meat from the Hudson plant. But Thomas J. Billy, administrator of the Food Safety and Inspection Service, a branch of the Agriculture Department, said officials believed that those victims became ill after undercooking frozen patties they had bought in stores.

Mr. Glickman said the Colorado outbreak highlighted the need for the Agriculture Department to work harder in educating the public how to prepare foods properly -- like insuring that meat reaches an internal temperature of 160 degrees Fahrenheit for at least 15 seconds.

Undercooked hamburgers sold by Jack in the Box fast-food restaurants in 1993 and found to have the E. coli bacteria were blamed for killing four children and making hundreds of other people ill.

Since then, restaurants have been advised to cook meat at temperatures that are sufficient to kill any harmful bacteria. In addition, it was largely as a result of the Jack in the Box outbreak that Government officials began devising new, more sophisticated protocols for inspecting meat, seafood and poultry while they are processed. The protocols were included in the Clinton Administration's food safety program that finally won Congressional approval this year as part of the 1998 budget.

But Mr. Glickman, a former Democratic Representative from Kansas, said the contamination found in the meat from the Hudson plant underscored the need to learn how animals contract harmful bacteria before they reach the slaughterhouse.

Bacteria enter an animal's system through a variety of ways, including drinking water or contact with fecal matter, which often clings to an animal's skin. But once they are slaughtered, skinned and deboned, it is impossible to determine which carcass might have contaminated others with the bacteria.

With new inspection controls at the slaughterhouses, one way to help track the source, Mr. Billy said, would be to tag animals as they leave a particular farm or feed lot, where farmers often send livestock to be fattened before slaughter.

Such a tracing system was proposed to Congress in 1980, said Carol Tucker Foreman, an Agriculture Department official in the Carter Administration. But it stalled under intense opposition from food industry groups and has never progressed in several subsequent efforts to get similar legislation through Congress.

In legislation that the Administration could send to Congress as early as the fall, Mr. Glickman said he would probably include a proposal for a tracing system as well as a request that the Agriculture Department be given the authority to require food companies to recall products that might be contaminated. He said he would also ask for the authority to impose fines against companies that do not comply with Federal monitoring regulations.

"Most Government agencies have that," he said. "It would be a useful authority to use."

1.

But the Administration's food safety plan, budgeted for \$43.2 million, includes only \$4.1 million for research on issues bearing directly on problems of animal contamination.

Mr. Glickman added: "Do we have all the resources we need? No. But that's life. We'll keep asking for more."

No Burgers for Burger King

MIAMI, Aug. 22 (AP) -- Burger King ran out of hamburgers today at its 700 restaurants in the United States after clearing its inventory of beef from Hudson Foods. Burger King, based in Miami, said all of its restaurants would have burgers back on the menu on Saturday.

CAPTIONS: Photo: Workers yesterday at the Hudson Foods meat plant in Columbus, Neb., read a memorandum saying that the company would cooperate with the Agriculture Department and that they should report for work on Monday, even though the plant has been closed indefinitely. (Associated Press)

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2/9/7 (Item 5 from file: 471)
DIALOG(R)File 471:New York Times Fulltext-90 Day
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25 Million Pounds of Beef Is Recalled

MICHAEL JANOFSKY

New York Times, Late Edition - Final ED, COL 06, P 1

Friday August 22 1997

DOCUMENT TYPE: Newspaper JOURNAL CODE: NYT LANGUAGE: English

RECORD TYPE: Fulltext SECTION HEADING: SECTA

Word Count: 1247

ABSTRACT:

Hudson Foods closes its meat-processing plant in Nebraska indefinitely and expands its recall of ground beef to 25 million pounds after Federal investigators find evidence that far more meat might be contaminated by hazardous E. coli bacteria than originally suspected; company's actions, though voluntary, are undertaken after Agriculture Dept threatens to force plant to close by withdrawing food safety inspectors; Federal investigators found evidence that in early June, hamburger patties showing evidence of E. Coli were added to production next day at plant; Agriculture Sec Dan Glickman says he will ask Congress to give Agriculture Dept authority to impose recall and civil penalties against plants that do not comply with Federal regulations; photos (M)

TEXT:

WASHINGTON, Aug. 21 - A meat-processing company is closing its Nebraska plant indefinitely and is expanding its recall of ground beef to 25 million pounds after Federal investigators found evidence that far more meat might be contaminated by a hazardous bacteria than originally suspected. Last week, the plant recalled 1.2 million pounds of meat.

Today's actions were voluntary, but they were undertaken by the company, Hudson Foods of Rogers, Ark., under an implicit threat from the Agriculture Department that unless the processing and administrative problems at the plant were corrected, the department would force the plant to close by withdrawing food safety inspectors.

Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said at a news conference today that the latest recall was the largest in United States history. Mr. Glickman said Federal investigators found evidence this week that hamburger patties left over from production on June 5 -- which showed evidence of the potentially deadly bacteria, E. coli 0157:H7 -- were added to production the next day. As a result, the company could not guarantee that any meat produced subsequently would be free of the bacteria, leading the Agriculture Department to press for the latest recall.

Every year in the United States, bacteria in meat, poultry, seafood, eggs, fruit and vegetables kill as many as 9,000 people, mostly children and elderly people, and sicken millions. So far, Colorado accounts for all 17 cases of E. coli poisoning traced to the Nebraska plant, and all of those people have recovered.

Mr. Glickman said: "I believe that the action we are taking today, while tough, is the only option based on the new information our investigators have uncovered. This is a big step, but the evidence indicates we have contained the outbreak."

Because a recall is only voluntary, Mr. Glickman said he would ask Congress in the fall to give the Agriculture Department the authority to impose a recall and civil penalties against plants that do not comply with Federal regulations.

In any case, supermarkets and restaurants that use or sell ground beef that might have been contaminated with E. coli bacteria were removing it today and were seeking to reassure customers about the safety of their products. (Page A18.)

The tainted meat from the Hudson plant, in the eastern Nebraska town of Columbus, is the most prominent case of the E. coli bacteria since four children died and hundreds of other people became ill in 1993 after eating undercooked hamburgers from Jack in the Box outlets in the Northwest.

That outbreak led to the creation of a Vice-Presidential commission, which proposed more stringent methods of monitoring hazardous bacteria in food-processing plants. A system of protocols recommended by the commission was a major part of the Clinton Administration's effort to improve food safety, a \$43.2 million program in the 1998 budget.

The Agriculture Department began investigating problems at the Hudson plant after company officials expanded their recall of ground beef to 1.2 million pounds on Aug. 15, the largest such recall at that time, from an initial recall of 20,000 pounds three days earlier. Hudson made the first recall after public health officials in Colorado identified the E. coli 0157:H7 bacteria in Hudson beef patties in late July and on Aug. 12.

But Thomas J. Billy, the administrator of the Food Safety and Inspection Service, an arm of the Agriculture Department, said that as Federal investigators looked deeper into plant operations they found that they plant had weak quality control standards, an inadequate system of record keeping and a routine practice of returning unused raw material into the next day's production.

It was on the basis of those conditions, Mr. Billy said, that the company agreed to recall the additional meat, which Mr. Glickman said had been distributed across the country in the form of four-ounce frozen patties to chains including Burger King, Boston Market, Wal-Mart, Sam's Club and Safeway supermarkets.

Department officials conceded they did not know how much of the 25 million pounds remained uneaten. Whatever is returned, they said, will be

meat already tainted before it reached the plant with a strain of E. coli 0157:H7.

And that strain is only one of E. coli's potentially 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, Atcheson said. He and others have identified about 60 more varieties of E. coli that the new tests won't find, and those varieties also carry the lethal agent, known as Shiga toxin.

Named nearly 100 years ago by a Japanese physician, Shiga toxin has caused outbreaks in Australia, Japan, Great Britain and the United States, using a variety of E. coli strains as its host.

About half of this country's 10,000 cases per year of E. coli-related illness come from ground beef, the health experts say. That's because the animal feces that spread the disease are found on the surface of the meat, and grinding the meat spreads the contamination.

"We recommend that you treat all meat as though it were contaminated," Mead said.

That means frequent hand-washing and keeping raw meat and raw-meat juices away from other foods, even storing them on separate plates. It's safe to serve whole cuts of meat rare or medium-rare because heat kills the surface bacteria. But ground beef should always be cooked until it's well-done.

**CAPTION:
BEEF PRODUCTION AND E. COLI INFECTION**

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DESCRIPTORS: FOOD; SAFETY

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09236139

**BURGER KING STOPS BUYING BEEF FROM FIRM OVER RECALL RESTAURANT
HAD PUT**

HUDSON ON PROBATION OVER EARLIER INCIDENT

St. Louis Post Dispatch (SL) - Sunday, August 24, 1997

By: Compiled From News Services

Edition: FIVE STAR LIFT Section: NEWS Page: 01A

Word Count: 971

TEXT:

COLUMBUS, NEB. - Burger King announced Saturday that it had stopped buying meat from Hudson Foods after Hudson recalled 25 million pounds of potentially tainted ground beef.

Mark A. Giresi, senior vice president and general counsel at Burger King, made the announcement. He noted that Burger King had placed the Columbus plant "on probation" last year.

Burger King took that action after several trucks rolled away from the plant loaded with frozen ground beef patties without waiting for the results of the bacterial tests that Burger King requires of all its suppliers, Giresi said.

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 Hudson spokesman, said Saturday.

But Giresi said Burger King officials were sufficiently alarmed that they did what they had never done to a supplier before: 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, Burger King stopped the special monitoring. Seven weeks later, the Hudson Foods plant became the object of what federal officials called the largest meat recall in United States history - 25 million pounds of ground beef.

So on Saturday, Giresi announced that Burger King would stop buying beef from Hudson Foods.

But he added that Burger King would continue to buy chicken from other Hudson Foods plants.

No Guarantees

And yet, in spite of meat recalls, scientific advances and stepped-up plant inspections, the federal government cannot ensure that Americans' food is free of dangerous bacteria.

Experts say it probably never will be able to.

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

The bacterium 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 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: Caveat emptor - Let the buyer beware.

Epidemiologist Paul Mead of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says: "People . . . believe the government will take care of them and secure a perfectly safe food supply.

"In fact, the government can't do that. Consumers have to play an active role in protecting themselves."

Under pressure from Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman, a meat-packing plant in Columbus, Neb., took steps last week to recall suspect frozen hamburger patties and to overhaul its procedures.

But scientists at the disease control center 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.

But the disease was faster, Atcheson added. He and others have identified about 60 more strains of E. coli the new tests won't find, and they, too, produce the lethal agent, known as Shiga toxin.

Named nearly 100 years ago by a Japanese physician, Shiga toxin attacks the cell walls of the intestine and, in severe cases, the kidney and brain. It is the cause of several different intestinal diseases, including dysentery in Africa and Asia. Produced by a variety of E. coli strains, it has caused outbreaks in Australia, Japan, Britain and the United States, in the last two years.

Because tiny quantities can bring on illness, even the available tests don't do that much good. Atcheson and his colleagues bought 32 one-pound packages of hamburger from local groceries and then tested a corner of each one. They found Shiga toxin in five packages - but when they retested other parts of those same one-pound packages, some portions tested clean.

Just A Tiny Sample'

"Just a tiny sample is enough to make you sick," Atcheson said. "So, can you test ground beef to a point where you can be entirely sure it was safe? In my opinion, no - not now, and probably not any time in the foreseeable future. Safe handling and cooking, that's where the buck stops."

In the case of meat that's pretty easy to do, health officials say. Cooking tainted meat to 160 degrees Fahrenheit destroys the toxin. But uncooked foods such as lettuce, juice, cider, alfalfa sprouts and radish sprouts also have caused disease outbreaks, and scientists aren't so sure how to prevent those illnesses. Health experts recommend washing all produce in cold water and regular soap, Mead said, but there's no real evidence that that helps.

CAPTION:
PHOTO

Photo from AP - At the Hudson Foods plant in Columbus, Neb., Friday, Patrick and Carol Marquez brought in hamburger patties that they said had infected three children with E. coli poisoning.<

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DESCRIPTORS: FAST-FOOD RESTAURANT; TERMINATION; FOOD POISONING
CONSUMER
HEALTH; SAFETY; ADVICE; NEBRASKA

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09235170

BURGERS BACK ON BROILER AFTER FUROR BEEF RECALL AFFECTING AREA RESTAURANTS

St. Louis Post Dispatch (SL) - Saturday, August 23, 1997

By: Victor Volland

Of The Post-Dispatch Staff

Robert Goodrich Of The Post-Dispatch Staff

Contributed Information For This Story, As Did Post-Dispatch Wire Services.

Edition: FIVE STAR LIFT Section: NEWS Page: 14

Word Count: 953

MEMO:

COVER STORY TYPE: PROFILE

BEEF RECALL

TEXT:

* The E. coli worry at Hudson Foods has spurred some defections, but Burger King spokesmen say the meat is safe.

Stacey Franko was lunching at the midtown McDonald's on Lindell Boulevard for her hamburger fix Friday.

"I usually go to Burger King when I crave fast food, but that E. coli thing scared me," said Franko, greasing back on a Big Mac with everything. She was referring to the 25 million pounds of ground beef recalled this week because of contamination by a strain of E. coli bacteria at a Hudson Foods plant at Columbus, Neb. The plant supplies hundreds of Burger King outlets across the country, including the 36 restaurants in the St. Louis area.

Franko, who lives in Washington, Mo., confessed slight qualms about satisfying her hamburger hunger at McDonald's.

"It's funny. I was just thinking about all that as I bit into my sandwich and wondering if..." she mused.

But the only chains in St. Louis that buy from Hudson are Burger King and the newer Boston Market, which has nine restaurants in the area. Miami-based Burger King said 1,650 of its restaurants in 28 states were affected by the recall Thursday of 25 million pounds of hamburger processed

at the Hudson Foods plant in Nebraska. Of these, 950 got new beef supplies Friday. Other Burger Kings in the chain didn't use Hudson as a supplier.

A Chicago spokesman for Boston Market said Friday that none of the Hudson meat came to any of the 250 Boston Markets in the Midwest, including St. Louis.

The busy Richmond Heights Burger King at 1200 South Brentwood Boulevard was temporarily burgerless until fresh hamburger stock arrived to replace suspect stock.

"We shut down the hamburger line for a while Thursday night till we got the fresh stock. We're even busier than normal today, maybe because of the TV publicity," Bob Howard, manager of the Richmond Heights outlet, said Friday.

Paul Clayton, North American president of Burger King Corp, said the company pulled the meat as a precaution. It maintains a separate production line at the Hudson plant in Nebraska, and its own testing showed no contamination. In addition, the chain's flame-broiled cooking system guarantees beef is cooked to the temperature that kills E. coli bacteria, he said.

"No tainted beef made its way to Burger King," Clayton said.

"Absolutely, customers are concerned," he said. "Obviously, our sales are probably not what we'd want them to be."

A Clayton mother brought her three children to the Richmond Heights Burger King for their favorite, chicken tenders, while succumbing to a Whopper for herself.

"I didn't know Burger King had got any of that E. coli beef but it probably wouldn't have made any difference. I love their hamburgers," the mother said, swallowing a bite.

At a Burger King by St. Clair Square in Fairview Heights, Gayle Tobler of O'Fallon, Ill., and children Wendy, 9, and Matthew, 8, ordered Whoppers all around.

"We love these 99-centers," Tobler explained with a laugh. "They're charbroiled, so I think they have less fat."

Doug Holt, the Missouri Extension Service's specialist on food safety, agreed that the charbroiling method killed bacteria. Cooking ground beef to an internal temperature of 160 degrees for at least one minute will kill E.

coli or any other harmful bacterium, he said.

Kevin Bornhop, manager of a Steak 'n Shake at 1253 Hampton Avenue, said the chain cooked all hamburgers at least medium-done, even if the customer orders it rarer, and has done so since the 1993 outbreak of E. coli in the West.

The only stores here served by Hudson Foods are those of the Wal-Mart chain, including Sam's Club outlets. But the Hudson frozen hamburger patties stocked by those stores here were pulled off the shelves last weekend, when the first alert was sounded. None of the supermarket chains, including Schnucks, Dierbergs, National, Straub's and Shop N Save, carry Hudson products, the chains said.

Hudson Foods agreed to recall all the beef that had been processed at the plant and to shut down the plant until stronger safety recommendations were met. The company did not indicate when the plant might reopen.

"We are confident that the plant is ready to open as soon as the (U.S. Department of Agriculture) is ready to come in and take a look at it," said Hudson spokesman Robert Udowitz.

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.

Burger Kings that carried Hudson beef are in Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Ohio, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Wisconsin, West Virginia and Wyoming.

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.

Since January, U.S. slaughterhouses have been required to test for generic E. coli on every 300 carcasses handled.

**CAPTION:
PHOTO**

Photo by Bill Greenblatt/UPI - A Burger King in Ellisville notifies customers that the restaurant had no hamburgers Friday. The store uses hamburger from a supplier, Hudson Foods, Inc., that has recalled beef that could be contaminated with E. coli bacteria.<

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DESCRIPTORS: FOOD; INSPECTION; HEALTH

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09235150

'93 LAW MAY AID SAFETY OF FOOD EXPERTS: FIRMS MORE RESPONSIBLE NOW

St. Louis Post Dispatch (SL) - Saturday, August 23, 1997

By: Robert Steyer

Of The Post-Dispatch Staff

Edition: FIVE STAR LIFT Section: NEWS Page: 15

Word Count: 625

MEMO:

COVER STORY TYPE: PROFILE

BEEF RECALL

SIDEBAR STORY

TEXT:

* But critics of the Hazardous Analysis and Critical Control Point Act say the law is akin to letting the fox guard the henhouse - or slaughterhouse.

Even as a big food company closed a meat processing plant and recalled 25 million pounds of hamburger, many food experts say the U.S. food supply will improve as companies take on more responsibilities for safety.

They cite a 1993 law, now just being implemented, as a way to improve prevention of food-borne diseases, such as those allegedly linked to the Hudson Foods plant in Nebraska.

The source of this optimism is a law called the Hazardous Analysis and Critical Control Point Act, or HACCP. Companies have three years to abide by federal regulations, which are being phased in depending on the size of meat-packing and meat-handling companies.

Supporters say the change may be the most significant change since enactment of the 1906 Meat Inspection Law, which was inspired by the investigative reporting of Upton Sinclair and his book "The Jungle."

"HACCP will take us from literally a poke-and-sniff inspection system to one in which we use state-of-the-art technology to - for the first time - go after hidden contaminants," said Dan Glickman, Secretary of Agriculture.

"Like anything in life, there is always room for improvement," said Andrew Clarke, associate professor for food science and human nutrition at the University of Missouri. "We can't check everything, and inspectors can't inspect everything."

Critics say the law is akin to letting the fox guard the henhouse - or slaughterhouse.

Although HACCP requires more meat safety checking by companies, food safety experts say the law should shift meat safety inspections to preventing problems rather than correcting them.

The new system says meat processors - whose new safety measures include testing machinery for bacterial contamination - will be monitored by inspectors from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. That includes inspecting records on items ranging from cleanliness to refrigerator temperatures.

"Right now, the inspectors feel like they are unpaid quality control staff," Clarke said.

The current inspection system was designed to find defects in meat related more to animal health than to safety for humans, said Michael Doyle, director of the Department of Food Science and Technology at the University of Georgia.

"Consumers have to recognize that meat inspection doesn't eliminate harmful bacteria - it can reduce it but can't eliminate it," he said.

"The new approach by the Department of Agriculture is better," Doyle added. "In reality, if a company is reputable, and most of them are, there will be a tremendous improvement under HACCP."

Consumers Still Leery

Despite assurances by the federal government and by industry, consumers are still jittery about food safety in general, said Christine Bruhn, a consumer food marketing specialist at the University of California-Davis.

She said a recent study by the Food Marketing Institute, an industry trade group, showed that 69 percent of respondents expressed concern about food safety, up from 46 percent in 1993. The responses were voluntary. When consumers were asked specifically about food safety, the concerns were greater.

"It's our advanced knowledge about medicine that has increased these concerns even though our food is very safe," Bruhn said. "Our knowledge has allowed us to become more aware of sources of food-borne illness."

St. Louisans in the meat-cutting and distributing businesses worry that the headlines about Hudson Foods could spook consumers unnecessarily.

"I feel our employees are just like the consumers who consume the products," said Paul Savage Sr., president of AA Hotel and Restaurant Supply, in St. Louis.

His company buys meat from big packers, then sells its to distributors.

"Each employee wants the product to be as safe as possible," Savage said.

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DESCRIPTORS: AGENCY

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09234112

MEAT RECALL EXPANDED; PLANT CLOSED 25 MILLION POUNDS OF
HAMBURGER BEING
WITHDRAWN FROM MARKET

St. Louis Post Dispatch (SL) - Friday, August 22, 1997

By: AP

Edition: FIVE STAR LIFT Section: NEWS Page: 01A

Word Count: 932

TEXT:

WASHINGTON - A plant in Nebraska that produced possibly hazardous hamburger patties has been closed and is recalling about 25 million pounds of the product, marking a huge increase in the potential scope of the contamination.

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

The Hudson Foods plant in Columbus, Neb., 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," Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said.

The announcement means that the recall is growing about 20-fold from last Friday to cover all patties ever made by the plant that are still believed to be in the marketplace.

Agriculture officials said it was the department's largest recall. But it is only a small fraction of the 8 billion pounds of ground beef of all types produced in the country each year. And the Columbus plant accounts for less than 7 percent of Hudson Foods' sales, the company said.

James T. Hudson, the company chairman, said Hudson had ordered the recall "out of an abundance of caution and to restore the public confidence."

Glickman said fewer than 20 people were known to have become 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 and then another 20,000. Last 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 Agriculture Department has evidence that the contamination occurred not in the plant, but at one or more of the slaughterhouses that supplies it, said Tom Billy, administrator of the department's Food Safety and Inspection Service. Officials are looking at the seven slaughterhouses that were known to have supplied the plant 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 was being expanded was that officials discovered problems in the plant's procedures Thursday morning. Specifically, he said, federal investigators discovered the plant had a practice of using leftover raw meat from one day in the next day's production.

That has made it difficult to know when the last of the tainted meat left the plant, officials said.

E. coli is 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 undercooked hamburgers.

Officials stressed that consumers should thoroughly cook hamburger, using a meat thermometer to make sure it is at least 160 degrees Fahrenheit.

The federal 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 whom were hospitalized. Eleven said they had eaten frozen patties, and eight specifically remembered eating Hudson Foods patties, the agency said.

The agency said the Hudson patties may have been distributed to all 48 contiguous states. The plant's major customers include Safeway, Wal-Mart, Burger King, Sam's Club and Boston Market, officials said.

All those except Safeway, which could not immediately be reached, said they were immediately ceasing sales of beef from Hudson Foods or had already done so.

Only 25 percent of Burger King restaurants will be affected by the recall; the other 75 percent have never carried the Hudson beef. A Burger King spokesman could not verify how many restaurants in the St. Louis area would be affected.

None of the major supermarkets in the St. Louis region carries the beef.

Officials said investigators now have discovered that patties produced June 6 included meat left over from the previous day's production - when the suspect meat was sent to the plant. "We're also concerned about the adequacy of their testing program," Billy said.

Responding to questions about the performance of federal inspectors regularly stationed at the plant, he said the investigation was "checking to see if they were doing their job."

Glickman said the outbreak showed the need for him to be given authority to levy civil fines and order recalls and shut plants. Congress has denied that power to the secretary several times, and Glickman said he would try again. Now, the secretary can halt meat sales from plants by denying them the department's inspection seal on the product.

Hudson said the plant's 230 employees will continue getting full pay until a further decision is made about the future.

Workers finishing their shifts Thursday stood behind the company.

"There's not anything that's not clean about this plant," said Brenda Marxsen.

Columbus Mayor Gary Giebelhaus said the city of 20,000, about 75 miles northwest of Lincoln, has a broad industrial and agricultural base that can survive the shutdown.

How To Look Out For Suspect Meat

The Agriculture Department advises consumers to return all Hudson Foods brand frozen beef patties with Establishment No. 13569 - printed inside the Agriculture Department inspection seal.

Consumers also should check with restaurants to make sure they are not using the suspected meat.

For more information, call the Agriculture Department at (800) 535-4555, or Hudson Foods at (800) 447-2670.

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DESCRIPTORS: BEEF RECALL

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DIALOG(R)File 496: The Sacramento Bee
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09237039

**TESTERS UNABLE TO GET TO ALL MEAT DEPLETED INSPECTION FORCE
OVERWHELMED**

Sacramento Bee (SB) - SUNDAY, August 24, 1997

By: Curt Anderson Associated Press

Edition: METRO FINAL Section: MAIN NEWS Page: A5

Word Count: 597

TEXT:

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 this week.

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

Agriculture Department inspectors go to slaughterhouses that supply Hudson and to 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 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.

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 at grocery stores.

Sixty-two 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 Monday, has a 5-percentage-point margin of error.

Pathogens such as E. coli remain a health problem in America. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 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 upward 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 such bacteria as E. coli. Some larger companies did it anyway, while smaller ones tested only if customers had specific requirements.

New inspection rules are being phased in by the year 2000 that for the first time require daily spot checks 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.

2/9/24 (Item 1 from file: 498)
DIALOG(R)File 498: Detroit Free Press
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09234034

STORES RETURN SUSPECT MEAT PLANT SHUTS DOWN FOR INVESTIGATION

Detroit Free Press (FP) - Friday, August 22, 1997
Edition: METRO FINAL Section: NWS Page: 1A
Word Count: 682

TEXT:

Michigan outlets of Wal-Mart, Sam's Club and Boston Market are among companies nationwide that are shipping batches of hamburger back to a Nebraska food plant that was shut down Thursday in the biggest meat recall in U.S. history.

Hudson Foods Co., the beef company linked to an outbreak of E. coli-tainted hamburgers in Colorado, agreed Thursday to pull off the market and destroy 25 million pounds of ground beef.

Under intense pressure from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Hudson also agreed 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.

The ground beef being recalled was processed in June, and some may already have been eaten. But because it is frozen, USDA officials believe much of it may still be stored by wholesalers, distributors, grocers and restaurants nationwide.

Wal-Mart, Sam's Club and Boston Market are the only food businesses in Michigan known to state officials to have bought hamburger produced at Hudson's Columbus plant, said GERALYN Lasher of Michigan's Department of Community Health.

Wal-Mart officials said sales of Hudson beef patties were stopped at its superstore and Sam's Club outlets on Aug. 13, after the original recall notice came out. On Thursday, the retailer said it was cooperating and returning all Hudson frozen ground beef patties to Hudson.

Boston Market issued a statement saying its restaurants don't serve frozen beef patties, the subject of the original recall, and that it instructs its outlets to bring the inside temperature of meat loaf to at least 170 degrees.

Investigators for the U.S. Department of Agriculture said the problems apparently trace to slaughterhouses supplying the Nebraska plant.

Last week, Hudson Foods began the recall, first with 20,000 pounds of meat and then another 20,000, and on Friday it became 1.2 million pounds of hamburger from the Columbus plant. It was widened to an estimated 25 million pounds Thursday after the USDA discovered the Nebraska plant used leftover raw meat from one day in the next day's production.

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 undercooked burgers.

Lasher said there have been no reports of illnesses in Michigan linked to contaminated food sold in stores and restaurants.

Other companies in Michigan also could be Hudson customers, but she said the state is making no special effort to track down other customers.

Officials at three leading Detroit-area supermarket chains -- Farmer Jack, Kroger and Meijer -- said their companies don't buy Hudson beef. Burger King said some of its stores around the country bought Hudson beef -- but none in Michigan.

U.S. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman announced the Columbus plant's shutdown, stressing that the company's action was voluntary, but came under threat of government retaliation.

Thursday's recall highlighted weaknesses in the nation's meat safety system, which has not been significantly modernized since the 1930s. 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, said microbiologist Hans Blaschek of the University of Illinois. By that time, potentially contaminated meat is far away, perhaps on consumers' dinner tables.

Heather Dewar and David Goldstein of the Free Press Washington Staff contributed to this report.

Business writer Ted Evanoff can be reached at 1-313-222-8763.

WHAT TO DO

Consumers are advised to return all Hudson Foods brand frozen beef patties with Establishment No. 13569 printed inside the USDA inspection seal, and to check with restaurants to make sure they are not using the suspect meat.

For more information, call the USDA hot line at 1-800-535-4555 anytime, or Hudson's hot line at 1-800-447-2670, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekdays.

Source: Associated Press

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DESCRIPTORS: BEEF; CONTAMINATION; RECALL; E. COLI; BACTERIA;
TELEPHONE

2/9/25 (Item 1 from file: 630)
DIALOG(R)File 630:Los Angeles Times
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02610625 53672
Meat Recall Raises Questions About New USDA Rules
Government should not rely too heavily on industry inspection

Los Angeles Times (LT) - TUESDAY August 26, 1997
Edition: Home Edition Section: Metro Page: 6 Pt. B
Story Type: Editorial
Word Count: 428

TEXT:

The recall of 25 million pounds of ground beef has put the nation on a food alert as it approaches the Labor Day weekend. Is that hamburger on the barbecue safe to eat? How many of us have had such a thought before buying or eating ground beef since the latest contamination incident, in which 16 people in Colorado fell ill after eating patties tainted with the potentially deadly bacteria known as *E. coli* 0157:H7.

The virulent bacterium appears contained for now by the largest food recall ever. But the scare raises new questions about consumer protections and the beef industry. Last year, the industry and the U.S. Department of Agriculture reached a compromise agreement on new "hazard control" rules, many based on voluntary measures in use by beef packers and processors. The goal is to move beyond the old USDA "sniff and poke" inspections to scientific identification of hard-to-detect pathogens.

The Hudson Foods Inc. plant in Nebraska, which processed the ground beef that was recalled, had a voluntary system that included routine testing for generic *E. coli* (which is found in the intestines of animals and people and usually is benign) and sporadic testing for the more potent *E. coli* 0157:H7, which can be fatal, especially to children and the elderly. Even so, a batch of Hudson frozen beef patties got out of the plant carrying the bacteria. Both the company and the USDA believe the contamination occurred at one or more slaughterhouses. The recall was so large because ground beef from the tainted batch was mixed later with another batch, and so on. The USDA does not prohibit using up leftover beef from the previous day, but the practice ought to be banned.

The new USDA rules, which begin to take effect in January, will require every packer and processor to identify contamination-prone spots in their processing and develop procedures to increase safety. The government will simply monitor a company's "self-policing."

Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman wants Congress to give his department the authority to recall meat, which is now voluntary on the part of the industry. That is important authority, but a greater urgency rests in the USDA; it should not get caught up in record-keeping at the expense of on-site inspection. Better oversight also should be established over feedlots and retail distribution.

The beef industry, by its own admission, cannot 100% guarantee its product. Its advice, to cook ground beef to 160 degrees Fahrenheit, is wise. But the industry and government need to do a lot more to restore public confidence in those Labor Day burgers.

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2/9/27 (Item 3 from file: 630)
DIALOG(R)File 630:Los Angeles Times
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02609395 52450
Hamburger Recall Grows; Packing Plant Will Close

Los Angeles Times (LT) - FRIDAY August 22, 1997
By: MARTHA GROVES; TIMES STAFF WRITER
Edition: Home Edition Page: 1 Pt. A
Word Count: 1,252

TEXT:

Vastly expanding what was already the largest food recall in U.S. history, a Nebraska plant that packaged possibly tainted hamburger patties is ordering back an estimated 25 million pounds of the product and will close indefinitely, Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said Thursday.

Hudson Foods Inc., owner of the Columbus, Neb., plant, agreed to vastly broaden the scope of the recall after federal inspectors uncovered production practices suggesting that more frozen beef might have been contaminated with E. coli bacteria than originally suspected.

Last week, after a link was made with 16 Colorado cases of E. coli food poisoning, Hudson Foods announced recalls over successive days, first of 20,000 pounds, then an additional 20,000 and, last Friday, a record 1.2 million pounds. Thursday's vault to 25 million pounds--or 100 million burgers--makes this by far the largest food recall that government officials could remember. That amount falls just shy of a typical day's U.S. production of ground beef.

Watchdog groups said the plant closing and continuing federal investigation of Hudson raise concerns about the government's plant-inspection methods at a time when food safety is increasingly on consumer's minds.

The Hudson products--all bearing establishment No. 13569--were distributed to grocery stores, fast-food chains and warehouse outlets, including Safeway, Sam's Clubs (owned by Wal-Mart), Burger King and Boston Market. USDA officials suggested that consumers check their freezers for any Hudson products and return them to the retailer for a refund.

It is not known how much of the beef is still in Southern California or might have been consumed here. But previous indications were that the region was only minimally affected.

Burger King announced it would immediately pull all Hudson products from its restaurants. About 25% 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, soon after the news conference. For a time, he said, meatloaf won't be available at certain outlets.

Southern California locations, the company said, do not use Hudson ground beef.

Hudson, based in Rogers, Ark., said in a statement that it was suspending operations "out of an abundance of caution and to restore the public confidence."

The plant will not reopen, Glickman said at a hastily arranged Washington news conference, 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."

Among other discoveries by U.S. Department of Agriculture investigators was that the plant had on two successive days packaged beef left over from the previous day's production, because of the breakdown of a packing machine. This proved problematic because the beef from the first of those three days--June 5--was later shown to contain *Escherichia coli* O157:H7, which can cause severe, bloody diarrhea and can be fatal. That problem was made worse by inadequate bookkeeping, which made it tough to track particular lots of meat, and by possibly unsatisfactory testing, said Thomas J. Billy, administrator of the agency's Food Safety and Inspection Service.

Although the USDA has no specific prohibition on such a practice, meat plants typically finish packaging the entire supply on a given day, Billy said.

The harsh action was called for, officials said, even though they have evidence that the contamination occurred not in the plant but at one or more of the slaughterhouses that supply it.

Technically, the Hudson action is described as a voluntary recall. But

Glickman used the opportunity to urge Congress to pass legislation granting the agency the authority to mandate food recalls on its own.

During the news conference, he said "one of the biggest loopholes" was the federal government's lack of power to order recalls. The agency often does not publicize recalls, depending on companies' assurances that suspect food products are removed from the pipeline before they get to the public.

"When Congress comes back from recess," Glickman said, "I will have ready for them legislation that gives me the authority to order recalls as well as to impose civil fines."

The administration supported two similar proposals earlier this decade, both of which failed.

Consumer activists said the steps raise concerns on two scores: the efficacy of government inspections and the safety of industry practices.

"The USDA puts its seal on meat and poultry, and they're supposed to make sure it's safe and wholesome," said Felicia Nestor, food safety project director at the Government Accountability Project, a whistle-blower-protection group in Washington. "The USDA should have had procedures in place and the enforcement resources to catch this problem before it got to this point."

However, she said, the agency is so short-staffed that inspectors have a very difficult time just getting to these plants. The Government Accountability Project last year issued a report warning of the dangerous shortage of federal meat and poultry inspectors. Many inspectors, Nestor said, must cover more than a dozen plants in a day over a route of more than 100 miles.

"Practices in the meat industry have been fairly sloppy until the past (few) years brought that industry under a microscope," said Caroline Smith DeWaal, director of food safety at the Washington-based Center for Science in the Public Interest, a consumer group. "These are the kinds of practices that the industry will have to come to grips with."

James "Bo" Reagan, executive director of science and technology at the National Cattlemen's Beef Assn., a Denver trade group, agreed that meat plant managers will undoubtedly be scrutinizing their own practices in the wake of this massive recall and plant closing.

"If I was running one, I sure would be going through everything that we were doing."

Beyond that, he said the trade group is "very supportive of what the USDA is doing."

Catherine Woteki, undersecretary for food safety, noted in an interview that the USDA is in a transition period. Beginning in late January, most meat and poultry plants will have to have in place a system of preventive controls, known as Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points, or HACCP.

Under this program, long advocated by activists and the food industry, companies must identify points in their production processes most likely to lead to contamination and to create acceptable plans for preventing it. They will be forced, among other things, to begin testing for E. coli, which is carried in fecal matter. There will be no tolerance for E. coli O157:H7, which was responsible for the deaths of four children who ate Jack-in-the-Box hamburgers in 1993.

Most experts maintain that scientifically based microbial testing, rather than inspectors' current "poke and sniff" method, will help curb contamination. The role of USDA inspectors, Billy said, will shift to include oversight and verification of these programs in addition to old-fashioned inspection methods. Inspectors also will broaden their duties to include coverage of trucking and other transportation methods and retail outlets, in an effort to follow food from farm to table.

Hudson spokesman Robert Udowitz, in Washington, said the company had an HACCP program in place, ahead of the government's mandated schedule. If that is so, that could feed the fears of HACCP opponents that such programs won't be enough to halt all contamination.

Hudson shares fell 19 cents to close at \$15.13 in New York Stock Exchange trading.

Times wire services contributed to this story.

CAPTION:

Photo: HEALTH: A Nebraska plant that produced possibly hazardous hamburger patties has been closed and is recalling 25 million pounds of the product. Above, Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman, left, and USDA's Thomas J. Billy, at briefing.
Associated Press

DESCRIPTORS: HUDSON FOODS INC; PRODUCT RECALLS; FOOD CONTAMINATION AND POISONING; BEEF; DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (U.S.)

2/9/28 (Item 1 from file: 631)
DIALOG(R)File 631:Boston Globe
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09236061

TOTAL INSPECTION IMPOSSIBLE, AGRICULTURE CHIEF ACKNOWLEDGES

Boston Globe (BG) - SUNDAY, August 24, 1997

By: Associated Press

Edition: Third Section: National/Foreign Page: A9

Word Count: 536

TEXT:

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. plant in Nebraska, shut down Thursday during a federal investigation into E. coli contamination, had been producing up to 3 million pounds of frozen hamburger every week. That's 12 million quarter-pound patties.

The Hudson situation has shaken some Americans' confidence, a Newsweek poll said, with 52 percent saying they are less likely to buy hamburger meat at grocery stores and 41 percent saying they are less likely to buy burgers at fast-food restaurants.

Sixty-two percent said the government should spend more money on food inspection to ensure that US-produced food is safe, even as 52 percent said the government is already doing a good job. The Aug. 22 survey of 501 adults, appearing in the magazine on newsstands tomorrow, has a 5 percentage point margin of error.

And, feeling customers' concerns, Burger King announced yesterday that it no longer would buy ground beef from Hudson's Columbus, Neb., plant.

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 said.

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

Agriculture experts told US 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 tomorrow.

Tight budgets at the agency just exacerbate the problem. The number of inspectors at the 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.

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 do not 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 like Upton Sinclair's "The Jungle," which exposed the 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.

New inspection rules are being phased in by the year 2000 that will require testing for bacteria.

EDPAGE;08/23 NKELLY;08/25,10:14 INSPECT24

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DESCRIPTORS: NAME-GLICKMAN; US; FOOD; PROBE; AGRICULTURE; SAFETY

2/9/30 (Item 1 from file: 632)
DIALOG(R)File 632:Chicago Tribune
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09239297

**A RAW NERVE TRENDINESS OF UNCOOKED MEAT AND SEAFOOD MAKES SOME
HEALTH
PROFESSIONALS NERVOUS**

Chicago Tribune (CT) - WEDNESDAY, August 27, 1997

By: Kristin Eddy, Tribune Staff Writer.

Edition: NORTH SPORTS FINAL Section: GOOD EATING Page: 3

Word Count: 1,117

MEMO:

COLUMN: Health watch.

TEXT:

For the generations of tuna eaters who grew up flaking whitish, fully cooked fish out of a can, what's on the plate in restaurants lately has been a bit of a shock.

These days, thick tuna steaks with barely seared exteriors slice open to reveal a purple interior of completely raw fish. And along with seasoned(not equal)but uncooked-salmon tartare, rare duck breast, wafer-thin slices of beef carpaccio, or a plate of freshly shucked oysters resting on ice, raw is all the rage.

Americans haven't seen this much tender flesh since the invention of the bikini.

At the same time, health professionals are more alarmed than ever about the risk of food-borne illness from animal products that haven't been fully cooked.

The Centers For Disease Control and Prevention estimate that up to 33 million cases of food-related illness-and up to 7,000 deaths-occur each year. Most are mild attacks of abdominal cramping and diarrhea.

No government agency has exact figures on how many incidents occur, because such stomach-flulike symptoms tend to be self-treated and unreported, says Dr. Penny Adcock, a medical epidemiologist with the CDC. "Even if you go to the doctor, testing (for food poisoning) isn't done because it is such a mild illness."

But what's mild for healthy adults can be lethal for children, the

elderly and those with compromised immune systems, such as people with HIV or AIDS, or anyone undergoing treatment for cancer. For those groups, eating raw or undercooked meat or fish is strongly discouraged.

Yet the public is rarely aware of food hazards unless they result in publicized events of death or serious illness. Those who have been eating rare hamburgers, clams on the half-shell and eggs over easy for years without getting sick may find it hard to take the warnings seriously. But health professionals caution that times have changed, not just because food diseases are being tracked more carefully, but because the new pathogens can be more dangerous.

Most notorious are the outbreaks of the E. coli O157:H7 bacteria such as that which caused the death of four children who ate improperly cooked hamburgers in 1992 and 1993.

And last Thursday, Hudson Foods Inc. recalled 25 million pounds of ground beef produced at a Nebraska plant. The plant, linked to contamination by E. coli, was closed at the insistence of Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman. It is one of the biggest food recalls in U.S. history.

Less familiar diseases, such as campylobacteriosis, which can be present in shellfish, or cyclospora infections, recently found on imported raspberries, have added to the spike in food-related illness.

Salmonella, a long-established concern with undercooked eggs and poultry, showed up in the past year in a new form that is resistant to antibiotics.

"We have many new pathogens to be concerned about," says Adcock. "We first discovered E. coli in meats and now it's more commonly associated with vegetables. We didn't even know about E. coli 10 to 15 years ago."

Yet fine dining restaurants increasingly use raw and barely cooked recipes, in part to make a statement about the freshness and superiority of their ingredients, according to Michael Moskwa, an instructor at the Johnson & Wales culinary school in Rhode Island. After decades in which processed, canned and frozen foods dominated the American palate, today's chefs are more interested in presenting foods in their most natural state, including raw.

Consumers know that chefs have better access to sushi-quality tuna, for instance, Moskwa says. "They have a little bit of trepidation about handling an ingredient like that themselves, so they say 'I'm going to leave it to someone else.' Or it's something that they want to try but

won't make for the family because the husband doesn't like it."

At Shaw's Crab House in Chicago, the five kinds of raw oysters and sashimi tuna "are the No. 1 and 2 appetizers we sell," general manager Tod Berger says. "More than things like calamari and sauteed scallops. And we do get a lot of inquiries about safety."

Berger says they sell raw shellfish with confidence because they know exactly where and when the oysters were harvested. Shellfish pulled from cold water areas, for instance, are less likely to be contaminated than those found in polluted warm waters.

But health professionals still don't want people to think pink. Meat and fish can be as fresh as possible and still be a health hazard.

"There are just a multitude of different bacteria and parasites carried in fish and meat, and some things can't be kept in control by the suppliers," Adcock says. "And if you get sick, you can get sick again. It's not like getting the measles and being immune."

Several factors work together to cause the increase in disease.

Speedier animal slaughtering and food processing sometimes incorporate waste material into the raw food sold at market. If the foods aren't cooked at temperatures high enough to kill bacteria, the consumer can get sick.

Another source is the billions of tons of food imported into the United States to meet consumers' demand for fruits, vegetable and other products year-round, even when that item may be out of season. Accompanying the shipments are bacteria and parasites that may not be detected by U.S. inspectors.

Although concerns once were limited to animal foods, the contamination of fruits and vegetables with animal or human waste has created a new health risk.

"We still believe that our food supply is safe as any in the world," says Arthur Whitmore, spokesman for the Food and Drug Administration's Center for Food Safety. "But we do not recommend that meat and fish be eaten unless it is fully cooked."

In June, the U.S. Department of Agriculture released a recommendation that hamburgers cooked at home be tested with a meat thermometer (see box on this page).

Officials say that progress is being made. On Aug. 15, the USDA announced the development of a rapid test for E. coli that could help producers detect the bacteria before it goes to market.

SAFE FOOD HANDLING

The U.S. Department of Agriculture urges consumers to test the internal temperature of meats with a thermometer when cooking, and to make sure fish and shellfish are cooked through before eating.

Recommended minimum internal temperatures:

Ground meat: 160 degrees

Beef roasts, steaks and chops: 145 degrees

Pork roasts, steaks and chops: 160 degrees

Chicken or turkey, whole: 180 degrees

Chicken or turkey, breasts: 170 degrees

CAPTION:

PHOTO (color): The availability of high-quality raw ingredients has tempted more restaurants to serve raw or barely cooked dishes, but health professionals worry about parasites and bacteria. Tribune photo by Bob Fila.

DESCRIPTORS: FOOD; HEALTH; FEDERAL; AGENCY; SAFETY; GUIDELINE

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09236387

BEEF RECALL PUTS FIRM ON HOT SEAT

Chicago Tribune (CT) - SUNDAY, August 24, 1997

By: Nancy Millman, Tribune Staff Writer.

Edition: CHICAGOLAND FINAL Section: BUSINESS Page: 1

Word Count: 1,061

TEXT:

Hudson Foods Inc., which on Thursday recalled a record 25 million pounds of beef for safety reasons, has attracted more national attention in the past week than it has in its 25-year history.

It's not the kind of attention any company desires.

The spotlight on Hudson could be especially difficult for the company to handle, because, although it is a \$1.4 billion publicly traded corporation, Hudson is essentially a family business.

Four family members sit on the eight-member board of directors, and the other four directors have close ties to the Hudsons.

James T. "Red" Hudson, the company's 73-year-old founder, chairman and chief executive officer, has been in the poultry business his whole career. His company, the nation's third-largest poultry company behind Tyson Foods Inc. and ConAgra Inc., last year processed an average of 5.2 million chickens per week. In the current fiscal year, it expects to increase capacity to 7 million chickens a week.

At the urging of major customers, it opened a plant in Columbus, Neb., in 1995 to process ground beef and package it as frozen patties and meatloaf for supermarkets, discount stores and restaurants.

The family's expansion into beef processing, the segment that now has turned into every executive's worst nightmare, may have been a strategic error.

In the short term, it will hurt the company's earnings. In the long term, the bad publicity could affect its customer relationships.

On Aug. 12, Hudson announced a recall of 20,000 pounds of ground beef after reports of illness caused by a potentially deadly strain of E. coli bacteria were linked to its beef. Since then, the news for the Rogers,

Ark.-based company has grown worse by the day.

By Aug. 15, Hudson had increased its recall to 1.2 million pounds of beef. And on Thursday, Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman pressured the company into recalling 25 million pounds of ground beef, its entire output since June 4--the biggest recall of meat in the nation's history.

Additionally, Hudson shut down its Nebraska plant under pressure from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, until the department's investigators determine that it has remedied practices they found compromised food safety. The USDA has no legal authority for enforcement of its regulations or recommended practices.

The company's chairman said the actions were taken "out of an abundance of caution to restore the public confidence," and his statements tried to position the moves as voluntary.

Hudson was not available for interviews last week.

"Red Hudson is very concerned about their corporate image and their reputation in the business," said analyst Leonard Teitelbaum, of Merrill Lynch in New York.

It is certain that the family's future in the food business is riding on what happens next.

As the public learned from news reports last week, Wal-Mart Stores Inc., Burger King Corp. and Boston Chicken Inc. are three of Hudson's biggest customers.

All three were forced to assure consumers that they had disposed of Hudson beef in their pipelines.

Wal-Mart accounted for close to 19 percent of Hudson's total sales in fiscal 1996, Burger King almost 6 percent and Boston Chicken about 4 percent of sales. "The loss of any of these customers could have a material adverse effect on the company," Hudson said in a filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission last year.

Overall, beef accounted for \$91 million, or 6.6 percent, of the company's sales last fiscal year.

Burger King, which had to deal with beefless restaurants at 25 percent of its locations last week, already has said it is re-evaluating its relationship with Hudson.

Hudson Foods began when Red Hudson left Ralston Purina Co. in St. Louis after a 26-year career. Ralston was exiting the poultry business, and Hudson formed a company in 1972 to take over some of its operations.

In February 1986, Hudson completed its first public offering of 2 million shares of common stock and used the proceeds to help finance an acquisition to double the company's size.

Over the past decade, it has moved into products with higher profit margins, including cooked and uncooked frozen items sold under brand names including Hudson, Delightful Farms, Gourmet Recipe and Carving Station.

According to documents filed with the SEC, Hudson also is one of the nation's largest processors of USDA commodity beef and pork into processed products for school lunch programs.

The management team and the board of directors both are dominated by Hudson family members. The chairman's 50-year-old son, Michael, has been president since 1985, and was named chief operating officer in 1987. He has served in production and sales and marketing capacities at Hudson.

James R. Hudson, 39, another son of the chairman, is a vice president of the company and director of transportation.

Both of the younger Hudsons are members of the board, as is Jane M. Helmich, 46, the chairman's daughter, who is described in the company's proxy statement as a homemaker.

Red Hudson, according to company documents, owns more than 9 million shares, or 32.1 percent of the company's Class A common stock. His three children own another 9.8 percent.

In fiscal 1996, Red Hudson's salary and bonus declined about 18 percent, to \$986,500, from \$1.2 million the previous year. Michael Hudson's slipped by 3 percent, to \$900,000 from \$925,000.

But Hudson's financial performance has not been stellar. In fiscal 1996, net income declined 35 percent, to \$23 million, or 76 cents per share, from \$35.8 million, or \$1.21 per share, in fiscal 1995, though sales increased about 14 percent, to \$1.4 billion.

And last month, Hudson shares fell after the company said its third-quarter sales would fall short of estimates and that it would take a charge of \$20 million, or 66 cents per share, to reorganize its Russian operations.

Hudson could see a 10- to 15-cent-per-share reduction in earnings this year from the recall, said Teitelbaum. But, he believes, Hudson's proactive handling of the problem will help to minimize the effect on future operations.

CAPTION:

PHOTO (color): Chairman and CEO James T. Hudson's three children are on the company's board. AP photo.

PHOTO (color): Patrick and Carol Marquez leave the Hudson Foods plant in Columbus, Neb., with a box of hamburger patties they contend are tainted with E. coli. The company agreed to recall 25 million pounds of beef. AP photo.

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LEVEL 1 - 15 OF 19 STORIES

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HEADLINE: Hudson crisis spurs debate over giving USDA more authority

BYLINE: RUSSELL RAY, ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

BODY:

What began July 9 as a simple barbecue for friends in Pueblo, Colo., has turned into an epidemic of concern over food safety that has the U.S. Department of Agriculture calling for more control over the food-processing industry. Some of Arkansas' federal lawmakers are reluctant to support such a proposal.

"There certainly was not any need, in this instance, for additional authority," Rep. Asa Hutchinson, R.-Ark., said last week.

The concern grew as the recall of beef produced by Hudson Foods Inc. of ,ers grew from 20,000 pounds to 25 million pounds -- the largest meat recall in U.S. history. As of last week, the USDA was still investigating how the beef became tainted with a potentially fatal bacteria known as Escherichia coli 0157:H7.

The chain of events that prompted the massive recall began in July when 22-year-old Lee Harding of Pueblo began showing early symptoms of food poisoning one day after eating two hamburger patties produced by Hudson's only beef-processing plant, located in Columbus, Neb.

A local hospital confirmed the man had been infected by the harmful strain of E. coli and reported it to the Pueblo city-county health department. The man told health officials that the hamburgers he ate at a barbecue the day before may have been undercooked, said Heather Maio, director of environmental health for the local health department. County health officials then collected the leftover Hudson hamburger patties from Harding's freezer and turned them over to the USDA for testing. The test results showed that the burgers contained the harmful E. coli microbe and proved to be the clue that helped health officials link several illnesses in Colorado to E. coli-tainted beef produced by Hudson.

As of last week, the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta had confirmed that 16 people in Colorado had become ill after eating Hudson-produced hamburger patties. All 16 cases were linked to E. coli food poisoning. The E. coli bacteria found in each case were genetically identical, said Tom Skinner, a CDC spokesman.

No deaths have been linked to Hudson beef products, Skinner said.

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Meanwhile, Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman is using the widely publicized recall to make headway on legislation that would give him the power to recall food and impose civil penalties for food-safety violations.

More Control Asked

At an Aug. 21 press conference, Glickman promised to draft legislation for Congress to consider when it reconvenes this week. Glickman announced Hudson's landmark recall and plant shutdown at the same press conference. Hudson issued the massive recall and closed the Columbus plant at the USDA's request.

"I agree wholeheartedly with the consumer groups who feel that one of the biggest loopholes out there is the fact that I do not have the authority to order a recall," Glickman said. "I think that most folks would be shocked to know that industry -- and not federal food safety experts -- ultimately make the decision as to whether or not food is recalled when the public's safety is compromised."

Still, some federal lawmakers are not convinced that Glickman and his agency need more power.

"I do not believe he has made his case yet for additional authority," Hutchinson said. "I think the agency has failed to recognize the extraordinary cooperation of Hudson Foods."

The Rogers-based company has fully cooperated with the USDA in its investigation and has demonstrated that it has the public's best interest at heart, Hutchinson said.

Glickman could have minimized the damage to Hudson Foods by talking about the company's cooperation, Hutchinson said. Glickman has instead perpetuated public fear by using "rather harsh terms" when speaking publicly about the federal investigation into the company, he said. Glickman called his investigators a "SWAT" team and said more stringent standards for the plant were "non-negotiable."

Two days after Glickman announced the recall, Burger King, Hudson's biggest beef customer, announced that it no longer would buy beef from Hudson.

Hudson last week sold the Nebraska plant, which employs 230 people and accounted for \$ 91 million in sales in fiscal 1996, to IBP (formerly Iowa Beef Producers) of Dakota City, Neb. No purchase price was disclosed.

Glickman already has the power to withdraw federal inspectors from a plant, which in effect would shut down any food-processing facility. That authority gives the agency tremendous leverage in getting a company to voluntarily issue a recall.

"Nobody is going to argue with the secretary in a situation like this because he can shut the plant down by simply taking his inspectors out," said Sen. Dale Bumpers, D-Ark. "You can't ship a product that does not have an official seal of the U.S. Department of Agriculture on it. All he has to do is just remove his inspectors, and you're effectively shut down anyway."

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Bumpers said he likely would not support a proposal that would give Glickman arbitrary authority to levy civil fines.

"I'm not sure I'm willing to turn the authority to levy civil fines over to one person," Bumpers said. "That's such a judgmental thing. Somebody could levy a fine that could bankrupt a company, and the fine might turn out to be totally unjustified."

However, Bumpers said he would consider supporting a bill that would give Glickman authority to make recalls and close plants when dealing with companies that have been cited for repeated violations of federal food-safety rules.

"I might give him some authority just in case somebody was very reluctant to cooperate," Bumpers said. "I would not be disposed at this time to grant him carte blanche, arbitrary authority to levy fines."

Since Hudson's initial recall of 20,000 pounds, Bumpers said he has twice spoken with Hudson founder and Chairman James T. "Red" Hudson, whom he has known for many years.

"They couldn't be more upset," Bumpers said. "When [the USDA] said 25 million pounds, that didn't go down too well, but they didn't argue about it."

Drafting Legislation

Agriculture officials are drafting the proposed legislation and plan to have ready to present to Congress when it reconvenes after Labor Day. The USDA declined to release details of the proposal last week.

The Clinton administration has twice tried to get Congress to give Glickman the authority to order recalls and levy civil fines. Both times, once in 1994 and again in 1995, the proposals were defeated in Congress. The proposals called for recall authority and civil penalties of up to \$ 100,000 a day for food-safety violations.

"I'm hopeful that the third time's the charm," Glickman said at his Aug. 21 press conference. "I think the public is much more focused on the problem, and there's really no question that the American people want government doing everything it can to ensure the food they put on their table is safe."

Both Hudson and the USDA believe the beef was contaminated before it entered the plant, perhaps at a slaughterhouse owned by one of Hudson's beef suppliers. E. coli 0157:H7 is found in the intestines of cattle and can infect beef when the cow is disemboweled in the slaughterhouse. Hudson didn't slaughter cows at its Nebraska plant. The beef it processed came from a handful of USDA-inspected plants.

USDA spokesman Steve Lombardi said the agency is two to three weeks away from making any conclusions from its investigation.

Although investigators are looking at Hudson's six beef suppliers, which neither the agency nor Hudson will name, they also are looking into record-keeping practices at the plant and whether the company tried to hide the full scope of the problem.

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"It was just very difficult to get answers to simple questions, like what it on what days," Lombardi said.

Was Hudson trying to cover up something? "That is one of the questions they're asking in the investigation," Lombardi said. "They are looking into whether Hudson was as forthcoming as they could have. But that hasn't been determined yet."

"Reworking" Beef

USDA officials said that they were disturbed by a practice at the plant of mixing day-old meat from one day's production with meat in the next day's production. The practice is common in the beef industry and is known as "rework."

"The practice in and of itself isn't a food safety issue," said Janet Riley, director of public affairs for the American Meat Institute. "It is harder to isolate a problem when a problem does occur."

Tests showed that beef produced at the plant on June 5 was contaminated with the dangerous strain of E. coli. Investigators later learned that meat processed on June 6 included leftover meat from June 5.

A lack of record-keeping prevented investigators from determining further which beef supplies were reworked into other days' production, Lombardi said. The information, he said, would have helped in limiting the recall. As a result, the USDA asked the company to recall all meat produced at the Columbus plant, which opened in February 1995.

The initial recall of 20,000 pounds was issued Aug. 12. By Aug. 21, it had ballooned to 25 million pounds.

At an Aug. 19 press conference, Red Hudson denied reports suggesting his company tried to mislead federal investigators in determining the size of the recall.

"I'm sure if that was the case, the USDA would be saying it already," Hudson told reporters.

Hudson said the volume of the initial recall was determined incorrectly because the company had little time to review all of its records. Company officials spent most of their time looking up code numbers on the product that needed to be recalled.

"This is what the public needed to know," Hudson said. "They didn't really care whether we had one pound or 1 million pounds. They needed to know what they might be looking for."

In the three months before the initial recall, the plant conducted 57 bacteria-detecting tests on samples of meat in the plant. None of them was positive for E. coli 0157:H7.

idespread Concern

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The recall has caused widespread concern among beef producers and consumers. A poll of 501 adults conducted for Newsweek magazine earlier this month as the story was getting wide attention found that 41 percent of those polled were less likely to purchase hamburger at grocery stores; 54 percent were less likely to buy hamburgers at fast-food restaurants. The poll's margin of error was plus or minus 5 percentage points.

Cattle ranchers worry the contamination scare could sour the public on beef, already struggling to hold its market share against poultry and pork.

"The cattle industry is worried about food safety," said Jim Clower of the Arkansas Cattlemen's Association. "But with the process the way we have it, it's very difficult to make it 100 percent safe."

John Marcy agrees. Marcy is an extension food scientist at the University of Arkansas' Center of Excellence for Poultry Science and a member of the federally funded Food Safety Consortium, which Bumpers helped establish. Marcy testified before Congress on the dangers of E. coli 0157:H7 in 1994.

Marcy said the federal government's new system of food-safety controls, known as Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points, will have a minimal effect on reducing food-borne illness. The program will require more extensive testing and better record-keeping on monitoring bacteria in meat and other foods. But contamination can occur at all stages of food production, from farm to table, Marcy said.

"There's no good way to keep this stuff out," he said. "Food safety is not a problem with a solution. Cooking does kill it. That applies to everything."

The preventive measures in the new food-safety system are being phased in at food-processing plants. However, the new system does not require specific testing for E. coli 0157:H7.

"It does require testing for generic E. coli, which is a broad indicator of contamination," Lombardi said. "But it's just an indicator of the general bacteria levels in their product, whether that's getting better or worse."

Community leaders in Columbus stood behind Hudson.

Community Support

Columbus Mayor Gary Giebelhaus said Burger King, the nation's second-largest fast-food chain, should have stood by Hudson Foods. The plant produced about 3 million pounds of beef weekly and accounted for \$ 91 million in sales in fiscal 1996. Burger King bought more than half the plant's beef.

"It's my opinion that Burger King and their parent company does not share the Midwest mentality of helping others in their time of need," Giebelhaus said.

However, Giebelhaus and others remained optimistic about the plant's future. Hudson had promised to paying plant employees until the USDA's concerns were resolved.

Dwayne Smith, co-chairman of the Columbus Economic Council, said Columbus residents believed the problems at Hudson weren't as big as the news media and

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the USDA purported them to be.

"We understand that the protection of the American consumer is first and foremost in all of our minds, but we do question whether this situation with Hudson has gone beyond the concern of the public," Smith said.

Columbus has more than 80 manufacturing companies, about 6,000 manufacturing jobs and about a 2 percent unemployment rate.

"If Hudson pulls out, it would have an impact on the community, but it would not be a major setback," Smith said before the plant was sold.

The Hudson plant was the community's eighth-largest employer. Smith has been in the plant several times and said the company took plenty of precautions when it came to food safety.

"I think they've taken every precaution imaginable to keep it as clean as possible," Smith said.

Hudson, which is expected to generate \$ 1.7 billion in 1997 sales, is primarily a poultry company and is the fifth-largest poultry processor in the country, slaughtering about 8 million chickens a week. Beef accounted for about 6 percent of its total sales.

HIC: Photo

James T. "Red" Hudson

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