

Press release

Dioxin in milk, beef and lamb meat in Skutulsfjordur, North West Iceland

Introduction

Contamination with dioxin and dioxinlike PCBs in milk, beef and lamb meat in Iceland appears to be localized to a valley (Engidalur) situated at the bottom of a fjord (Skutulsfjordur). The farm from which samples have been obtained is situated in a narrow valley, surrounded by high mountains. A garbage incinerator for the local community is situated in the valley, close to the farm. Calm weather prevails in the valley. The dioxin and dioxinlike contamination is considered to originate from the incineration of garbage in the vicinity. Operation of the incinerator has been ceased. Presently there is no suspicion of such a contamination elsewhere in Iceland.

Milk

Laboratory analysis of one milk sample taken at the only milk farm in Skutulsfjordur, North West Iceland, in December 2010 showed values above maximum limits for dioxin and dioxinlike PCBs (3,98 pg/g fat for dioxin and 7.42 pg/g fat for the sum of dioxin and dioxinlike PCBs). The maximum legal limit is 3,0 pg/g fat for dioxin and 6,0 pg/g fat for the sum of dioxin and dioxinlike PCBs. The distribution of milk and slaughtering of animals from the farm in Skutulsfjordur and from a few hobby sheep farmers in the area were at once prohibited. New samples were taken of the milk at the farm and some neighbouring farms in adjacent fjords and meat samples were taken from the private households of the farmer and from some hobby sheep farmers in the same area.

The laboratory results of the new milk sample taken at the farm in Skutulsfjordur showed levels of dioxin and dioxinlike PCBs above the the maximum legal limit (4,9 pg/g fat for dioxin and 10,2 pg/g fat for the sum of dioxin and dioxinlike PCBs), confirming earlier results. Other milk samples revealed normal low levels for Icelandic milk (0,15 – 0,20 pg/g fat). Consequently, distribution of milk from the farm in Skutulsfjordur is still prohibited. As a precautionary measure distribution of cheeses from one dairy plant buying milk from the farm was stopped and products disposed of.

Beef

Two samples of beef taken at the farm in Skutulsfjordur showed increased levels of dioxin and dioxinlike PCBs and one of those was above the legal maximum limit (4,7 pg/g fat for dioxin and 12,3 pg/g fat for the sum of dioxin and dioxinlike PCBs). The legal maximum limit for meat is 3,0 pg/g fat for dioxin and 4,5 pg/g fat for the sum of dioxin and dioxinlike PCBs. Products from five animals slaughtered from this area last autumn were distributed on the domestic market. This meat has now been recalled.

Lamb

Seven samples of lamb meat were taken from the private households of the farmers. Two of the samples showed normal low values for Icelandic lamb meat (0,12 – 0,28 pg/g fat) and two had slightly elevated levels. Three of the samples showed increased levels, one of which exceeded the legal maximum limits, though not significantly (3,3 pg/g fat for dioxin and 5,3 pg/g fat for the sum of dioxin and dioxinlike PCBs).

Lamb meat on the market

On September 28th 2010, 384 lambs from three farmers in the area were slaughtered, yielding approximately 6,5 tons of meat, of which approximately five tons were exported to the United Kingdom (2,2 tons) and Spain (2,7 tons) and 1,5 tons were distributed fresh on the domestic market.

No meat was available for testing from the animals that were slaughtered at the slaughterhouse. Consequently, and as a precautionary measure, the slaughterhouse informed their buyers on the domestic market and in the United Kingdom and Spain and recalled the lamb meat from the market.

Conclusion

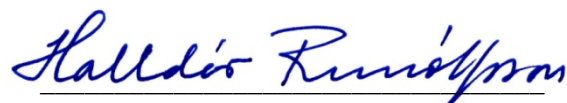
The Icelandic Food and Veterinary Authority (MAST) will take further samples for analysis, but this case is regarded as an isolated incident with limited quantity of animal products affected. The only affected farm is near a garbage incineration plant where elevated levels of dioxin have been detected by the Environmental Agency of Iceland. This is regarded as the source of the contamination and the plant has already been closed.

MAST will now send information on the status of this case through the European Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) with detailed information on the distribution of meat on the market and measures taken for recall of products.

On behalf of the Icelandic Food and Veterinary Authority,



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Halldór Runólfsson,
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Selfoss, 11 February 2011