

Congress calls egg company owners to testify

August 26 2010, By MARY CLARE JALONICK , Associated Press
Writer

(AP) -- Food and Drug Administration officials says they have found positive samples of salmonella at the two Iowa farms involved in a massive egg recall.

The officials said investigators found [salmonella](#) in chicken feed that was sold to both Wright County Egg and Hillandale Farms. More than 550 million eggs from the two farms were recalled this month after they were linked to as many as 1,300 cases of salmonella poisoning.

Sherri McGarry of the FDA's Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition said the tests indicate that contaminated feed is a source of the outbreak but possibly not the only source.

THIS IS A BREAKING NEWS UPDATE. Check back soon for further information. AP's earlier story is below.

WASHINGTON (AP) - A House panel wants the owners of two Iowa companies involved in a massive egg recall to explain how eggs from their farms were linked to as many as 1,300 cases of salmonella poisoning.

A House Energy and Commerce subcommittee will hold a hearing on the recall Sept. 14. The committee is inviting Austin "Jack" DeCoster, the owner of Wright County Egg, and Orland Bethel, the owner of Hillandale Farms, to testify. The two farms have recalled more than 550 million eggs after they were linked to the cases of salmonella poisoning.

The committee is doing an investigation into the recall and has written both farms, asking about company operations, communications with the government and what they knew and when.

The panel has also written the [Food and Drug Administration](#), which oversees the safety of shell eggs, and the Agriculture Department, which oversees other egg products and the health of the hens. The committee asked for records of inspections and past communications with the two farms, along with other documents. The FDA has said it has "no inspectional history" with the two farms.

Rep. Rose DeLauro, D-Conn., who heads the spending committee that oversees the FDA and USDA, has also written letters to the two agencies.

A spokeswoman for Wright County Egg would not say if DeCoster will attend the September hearing, but said the company is "working right now" to respond to the committee.

"We will approach it in the same forthright manner as we have in our cooperation with FDA to date," said Hinda Mitchell.

DeCoster has not responded to interview requests, and a worker at his office's headquarters near Galt, Iowa on Wednesday said he wasn't available. At his home in Clarion, Iowa on Wednesday, his wife Patricia also said he was not around. She said the last few weeks "have been quite a time for us" but declined further comment.

A spokeswoman for Hillandale Farms did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

FDA officials have said they don't expect the recall to grow beyond the two farms. The number of illnesses, which can be life-threatening,

especially to those with weakened immune systems, is expected to increase.

Thoroughly cooking eggs can kill the bacteria. But health officials are recommending people throw away or return the recalled eggs.

More information: Food and Drug Administration:

<http://tinyurl.com/25ot6ss>

Centers for Disease Control: <http://tinyurl.com/27lla8y>

Foodsafety.gov: <http://www.foodsafety.gov>

Egg Safety Center industry recall information: <http://www.eggsafety.org>

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