

# Germany kills 140 dioxin-contaminated pigs

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(AP) -- German authorities ordered 140 pigs slaughtered Tuesday after tests showed high levels of a cancer-causing chemical for the first time in swine, as the nation's dioxin scandal widened beyond poultry and eggs.

The top agriculture official in northern Germany's Lower Saxony state demanded the cull after tests found illegal levels of dioxin in swine at a farm near Verden that purchased tainted feed from the company believed to be responsible for the scandal.

German firm Harles & Jentzsch GmbH, which produced fat used in the tainted feed pellets, is being investigated over allegations it did not alert authorities to the tainted product for months. Tests have shown that fat samples contained more than 70 times the permitted amount of dioxin.

"We were specifically investigating this farm, because they had bought their livestock feed from Harles & Jentzsch," Lower Saxony's Agriculture Minister Gert Hahne said.

Some 140 of the 536 pigs at the affected farm have to be slaughtered because the dioxin levels in their flesh were 50 percent above the maximum allowed, Ulf Neumann, a spokesman for the Verden government, said Tuesday. The other pigs apparently did not eat the contaminated feed.

The scandal broke last week when German investigators found excessive levels of dioxin in eggs and some chicken. Authorities then froze sales of poultry, eggs and, as a precaution, pork, from thousands of farms as

some countries banned German farm products.

Some 558 farms still remained closed on Tuesday, said Holger Eichele, a spokesman for the federal agricultural ministry.

Germans love their pork. In 2009, about 7.7 million tons of meat were produced in Germany - pork being the No. 1 at almost 68 percent, followed by poultry at 17 percent and beef at 15 percent, according to the Meat Industry Association. Some 1.4 million tons of German pork was exported in 2009, mostly to other European Union countries.

Agriculture Minister Ilse Aigner has said officials were working nonstop to find out who and what had contaminated the feed and vowed tough legal action against those responsible. She said companies should be banned from producing both industrial fats and fats used for livestock, to avoid the possibility that industrial fats could end up in animal feed.

Harles & Jentzsch chief Siegfried Sievert has said the company believed that byproducts from palm, soy and rapeseed oil used to make organic diesel fuels were safe for use in livestock feed.

In Brussels, the EU was considering how to better monitor fat for animal feed, said Frederic Vincent, the spokesman for Health and Consumer Policy Commissioner John Dalli. EU officials met with fat producers but "we were somewhat disappointed by the absence of proposals from the industry," he said.

The German dioxin scandal is the fourth in the EU over the past decade - and each time fat made for industrial use ended up in animal feed. Germany has had another dioxin scandal in the past and so did Belgium and Ireland.

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