

New Zealand botulism scare likely a false alarm

28 August 2013, by Nick Perry

A botulism scare that damaged New Zealand's international reputation for providing top quality and safe dairy products was likely a false alarm.

New Zealand government officials said Wednesday they had found no sign of botulism bacteria after retesting ingredients used in recalled milk products.

Dairy company Fonterra sparked a global recall of infant formula this month after announcing it had discovered the presence of botulism bacteria in some of its whey protein concentrate.

But New Zealand's Ministry of Primary Industries announced Wednesday that its own extensive retesting of the concentrate indicated the presence of another, less dangerous type of bacteria but not the botulism bacteria.

Officials said the bacteria they found poses no health risk but could spoil the product in high quantities.

Officials sought to reassure international markets Wednesday by lifting their own warnings about affected Fonterra products.

Several countries have instituted limited bans on New Zealand dairy products.

New Zealand officials said they conducted 195 tests in laboratories in New Zealand and the United States. They concluded that the bacteria in the whey concentrate were *Clostridium sporogenes*, and not the *Clostridium botulinum* initially identified by Fonterra's tests.

Fonterra Chief Executive Theo Spierings said he was "very relieved" at the latest results.

"It's good news it's all clear for us regarding this recall," he said.

Spierings said the company acted quickly and out of an abundance of caution in triggering the recall and he didn't regret that. He said the initial Fonterra tests were performed by government agency AgResearch. He declined to discuss what may have gone wrong in those tests.

Spierings said Fonterra remained concerned about the contamination of its products, even though it wasn't as bad as first thought.

The company earlier identified dirty pipes in a Waikato factory as causing the contamination.

Earlier this month, Spierings traveled to China to perform damage control in that key market. New Zealand relies on dairy exports to power its economy.

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