



DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND COMMERCE
LESTER SPELL, JR., D.V.M.
COMMISSIONER

PRESS RELEASE

Contact: Andy Prosser, Bureau Director
(601) 359-1158
E-mail: andy@mdac.state.ms.us

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PET FOOD POISONING IS A WARNING

By Lester Spell, Jr., D.V.M.
Mississippi Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce

Having spent many years as a practicing veterinarian, I know first hand the love and affection that we have for our pets. The current toll of pets dying due to toxic ingredients from a foreign country is a somber warning of the potential dangers that we face when using foods and food ingredients from other countries. This tragic situation shows the potential speed and widespread effects of a food-poisoning event. These could have been human lives lost to food-borne poisons.

Many countries that ship food into the United States are known to use chemicals, pesticides and even antibiotics in food production that have long been banned in our country. A perfect example of danger in imported foods is the discovery of malachite green, a known cancer-causing compound, and a banned antibiotic in foreign fish imported to compete with America's safe and fresh farm-raised catfish.

Today, only a very small portion of the food imported from other countries is ever checked for food safety. According to the United States Department of Agriculture database, 49 shipments of Chinese (the same country that sent us the pet food ingredient that has killed so many pets) catfish were refused entry into the U.S. last year. Of those shipments, 33 were banned because they contained unapproved chemicals or drugs; 8 shipments were falsely labeled as catfish when they contained other species of fish; and 8 shipments were falsely labeled and also contained banned drugs or chemicals. In January of this year alone, 10 shipments were refused by U.S. officials. According to the Federal Drug Administration (FDA), the shipments contained banned and potentially dangerous chemicals and antibiotics.

American consumers are approaching a crossroads where we will have to make the choice of benefiting from self-sufficiency with our food supply or accepting dependency upon other countries. The pet food poisonings clearly show the hazards of buying cheaper food and food ingredients from foreign countries that don't have to live up to the same safety standards as American farmers and American food processors.

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Our country's inspections of imported foods have not increased in proportion to the vast increases in food imports that enter our country everyday. Federal inspection services that are suppose to check imported foods are both understaffed and under funded.

The only way to help insure safety of the food you buy for your family is through consumer awareness. When you eat at a restaurant or buy in your local grocery store, ask about the Country of Origin Labeling (C.O.O.L.) if it is not designated on the menu or on the food package. Buying American foods also insures that we keep America's farm economy strong. If we lose farmers because of cheap but potentially dangerous imported food, our entire population will face dangers and food prices that we never imagined.

Paul Harvey, the famous radio news commentator, said it best when he said, "Heaven help the nation that does not have him (the farmer) to support it."

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