

Dioxin threat eggs from Germany baked in UK cakes

Eggs from German farms where animal feed has been contaminated by dioxins have been used in some British cakes and quiches, the BBC has learned.

The EU executive said 14 tonnes of eggs in liquid form had been exported to the UK but it was unclear if those eggs were contaminated.

The UK's Food Standards Agency said two UK manufacturers had used the eggs.

It said there was a very low risk to human health, because the eggs were diluted with other products.

Newly released test results on a batch of contaminated German animal feed suggest it contained more than 77 times the approved amount of dioxin.

The FSA said following the distribution of eggs from the now-closed German plant to the Netherlands, they were mixed with non-contaminated eggs to make pasteurised liquid egg.

This product has been distributed to the UK.

The cakes and quiches, sold in High Street supermarkets, have a short shelf life, BBC Radio 4's You and Yours reported.

The FSA said it did not have a "definitive list" of the supermarkets that sold the products, but Tesco and Morrisons were two of them.

The shipment of potentially-contaminated liquid egg came into the UK from the Netherlands in December, so the products are likely to have been eaten by now.

A Morrisons spokesperson said it had withdrawn a small number of products as a "precautionary measure to give customers full confidence".

Tesco said it was also withdrawing a small number of products as a "purely precautionary measure".

Kensley Foods in Cornwall and Memory Lane Cakes in Cardiff were named as the manufacturers by the FSA.

In a statement, the FSA said: "There is no food safety risk from eating these products. The majority of products will have been sold and most have passed their 'use by' or 'best before' dates.

"Supermarkets are removing the small amount of products that are still in date."

Finsbury Food, the parent company of Memory Lane Cakes, said it had been notified one of its sites had received a batch of liquid egg which contained a "small percentage of eggs" from a farm in Germany "potentially affected by a dioxin contaminated feed incident".

A statement said: "The FSA is advising that there is no risk to health, and the company has had no confirmation that the batch of egg is contaminated with dioxin or at what level.

"This egg has been used to make a number of products; Finsbury is currently undertaking traceability tests and is working with both customers and the FSA with the ensuing investigation."

'No food safety risk'

Kensey Foods also confirmed it had received some of the batch of pasteurised liquid egg that may have been contaminated.

A statement said the company was "committed to ensuring the safety and quality of all of its products".

"Kensey Foods reiterates the advice issued by the Food Standards Agency that there is no food safety risk from eating the products produced using the pasteurised egg," it added.

EU Health Commissioner's spokesman Frederic Vincent said German authorities had identified contamination but authorities in both the Netherlands and the UK were still investigating.

"The British authorities will have to make some tests... on where and how the eggs were used," he said on Friday.

Ian Jones, from the British Egg Products Association, said the versatility of liquid egg made it useful to food manufacturers and the market was "extremely big".

Association members were "extremely concerned" about the impact of the contamination on the industry, he said, and urged people to check for the British lion mark on eggs which had a "very detailed code of practice".

"The FSA have made it very clear that the level of any potential contamination is very low but the fact remains the contaminant shouldn't have been in the product in the first place and there are ways of making sure that safe food is produced," he added.

Farms closed

The alert began when it was discovered thousands of tonnes of animal feed contaminated by highly toxic dioxins had been sent to more than 1,000 poultry and pig farms in Germany.

Eggs from those farms were sent to the Netherlands for processing and then on to the UK.

The problem has been traced to oils intended for bio-fuel becoming mixed with oil destined for animal feed.

The dioxin was discovered in late December but the extent of the problem was only revealed earlier this week when German officials said 3,000 tonnes of feed had been affected.

Germany has closed more than 4,700 farms, mostly in the Lower Saxony region in north-west Germany. They say the closures - mostly affecting pig farms - are only a precaution.

German officials are investigating possible "illegal activity" after a company allegedly supplied 25 animal feed makers with 3,000 tonnes of contaminated fatty acids.

Officials have traced the contamination to the Harles und Jentsch plant in the northern state of Schleswig-Holstein, where oils intended for use in biofuels were distributed for use in animal feed.

"The first indications point to a high level of illegal activity," said a spokesman for Agriculture Minister Ilse Aigner on Friday.

German officials will brief their EU counterparts next week and the incident could lead to new rules on animal feed.

Dioxins are toxins formed by industrial processes and waste burning.

They have been shown to contribute to higher cancer rates and to affect pregnant women.