

GERMANY FACES A RANGE OF FOOD SCANDALS

The Ministry of Agriculture in Germany conducted safety tests on milk over the weekend March 2nd – 3rd after it emerged that thousands of farms had given animals feed contaminated with high levels of the carcinogenic aflatoxin B1. This is the third food scandal after the ongoing horse-meat scandal in Europe and a case where egg farmers are currently under investigation for allegedly falsely labelling battery chickens' eggs as organic.

Aflatoxin B1, one of the strongest known naturally-occurring carcinogens, is produced by the *Aspergillus* mould, which can develop on grains when left in warm and humid conditions. German authorities banned milk deliveries from hundreds of dairy farms on March 1st, concerned that cows fed with maize contaminated with high levels of aflatoxin B1 could result in milk with the related substance aflatoxin M1 above allowed limits. The related legislation is defined in EC Directive 2002/32/EC¹ on undesirable substances in animal feed and in Commission Regulation (EC) No 1881/2006² (amended by (EU) No 165/2010³) setting maximum levels for certain contaminants in foodstuffs. The ministry said it had tracked the breach to a shipment of 40,000 tons of maize from Serbia, 10,000 tons of which was processed into animal feed for chickens, cattle and pigs. The animal feed was delivered to 4,467 farms in Lower Saxony alone, including 968 dairy farms, the state's agricultural ministry confirmed on March 03rd 2013. The ministry said it believed there was no risk to consumers after initial test results on the following day showed milk from 79 of the affected dairy farms contained only low traces of the carcinogen. While authorities say meat and eggs from animals which have ingested aflatoxin B1 are not dangerous to human health, they have yet to confirm whether offal from the affected animals is safe to eat. Tests are now being carried out on the remaining farms⁴.



¹ [Directive 2002/32/EC](#)

² [Commission regulation \(EC\) N° 1881/2006 of 19 December 2006](#)

³ [Commission Regulation \(EU\) N° 165/2010 of 26 February 2010 amending Regulation \(EC\) N° 1881/2006](#)

⁴ ["Germany tests milk in carcinogen scare" \(The Guardian\)](#)

In February 2013 as many as 150 German and 36 Dutch poultry farms were investigated for fraud involving organic eggs. Led by prosecutors in Oldenburg, Germany, the investigation is looking into violations of organic rules for free-range egg production. To sell "free range" eggs in Germany requires meeting specific time requirements for populations of hens being kept on the farm. The "free range" status is lost if too many animals are kept during the same time period on a pre-defined area. The Dutch poultry farms are suspected of supplying laying hens to German poultry farms using a double book-keeping system and fake bills. This allowed the German poultry farms to show that they had fewer chickens on their farms than they in fact did. This system allegedly allowed the German poultry farms to label eggs as organic, fetching higher prices, when they in fact kept too many chickens not raised or held according to organic specifications. Eggs sold in the European Union (EU) are stamped to show the country and farm where they came from and whether the hens were raised organically, free range or in a battery⁵.

The suspicions of organic egg fraud coincides with the discovery that horse meat was labeled as beef in processed food sold around Europe, as we informed you⁶. The scandal has triggered recalls of convenience food and unsettled consumers.

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⁵ [Europe Deals With Organic Egg Scandal on top of Horse Meat Problems](#)

⁶ [SafeGuards 034/13](#)

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