
Agriculture

Swiss cartel poisons U.S. dairy cows

by Marcia Merry

In all the national media coverage of the animal feed disaster in the Arkansas region this year, in which feed containing the pesticide heptachlor was wrongly fed to dozens of dairy herds and some other livestock, no attention was focused on the origin of the contamination—Ciba-Geigy, the Swiss pharmaceutical cartel, which “should have known better.”

It takes at least two years for the heptachlor to work itself out of the animal's system, but it shows up right away in the milk produced. Dairy farmers with affected herds have not been indemnified properly, and dairy farmers across three states face a forced shutdown, even faster than the general depression would cause.

Ciba-Geigy, and a few other oligarchy-controlled European giants, like the Swiss company Sandoz, or Royal Dutch Shell, have, in recent years, been buying into a monopoly position in the U.S. seed supply business. Ciba-Geigy owns the former American company, Funk Seeds International, whose hybrid seed corn—treated with heptachlor—was the source of the contamination.

The chain of events went like this. In 1985, a local, independent feed supply company, Valley Feeds of Van Buren, Arkansas, was buying cheap grain for its ethanol still. Valley Feeds, and similar feed suppliers, have started up such side-lines in order to get extra income from the gasoline additive to try to stay solvent. After the ethanol is distilled out of the grain batch, the leftover grain mash is sold as cattle feed—a nutritious mix. At some point, discount seed grain was offered to Valley Feeds, for use in the still.

Seed grain is permitted by government regulation, to be treated with heptachlor—one of the few agricultural uses still allowed in the United States, since heptachlor has been banned for general agricultural use since 1978, after some tests showed it was carcinogenic to animals. By law, all seed grain treated with pesticides that might be toxic is dyed a bright red to prevent accidental livestock poisoning. Seed companies that have leftover seed stock each year arrange to sell it the next season in a “discount blend,” or dispose of it in a land fill, or take measures to make certain it stays out of the food chain. If the seed is planted, germinated and grown, the heptachlor is gone.

The seed grain bought by Valley Feeds was “Funk's G”—the corn hybrid brand of Funk Seeds International, the Bloomington, Illinois company wholly owned by Ciba-Gei-

gy. The distillation process does not remove the heptachlor. So the heptachlor-contaminated “Funk's G” continued into the mash process, and contaminated the animal feed.

The Valley Feeds company should not have let this happen. But the international giant Ciba-Geigy should not have been disposing of their seed corn in this fashion, knowing that there are hundreds of cash-strapped farm supply companies where a slip-up might occur.

Ciba-Geigy has refused to admit any connection to the disaster, in a classic, high-handed manner. This is typical of the functioning of the foreign, oligarchy-controlled seed, food processing, and commodity companies coming to dominate the U.S. farm and food sector. Funk Seeds International, run by Ciba-Geigy out of its original headquarters in Bloomington, claims that a certain “Midwestern broker” was responsible for dumping this treated seed grain in such an irresponsible way.

As of five years ago, the two Swiss chemical cartels—Ciba Geigy and Sandoz—alone controlled most of the U.S. sorghum and alfalfa seed supplies. Between 1968 and 1978, large companies—including most prominently, the European oligarchy-run names, such as Shell, Cargill, Sandoz, and Ciba-Geigy—bought 30 major seed companies.

A 30-year seed sales representative for one of the few remaining independent U.S. seed companies, Pioneer Hybrids, said this kind of careless disposing of the “Funk's G” should not have happened in the proper course of the seed trade.

After Food and Drug Administration (FDA) officials confirmed in early March that Valley Feeds was selling the heptachlor-tainted mash, they closed the plant and tracked down where the contaminated feed went. Valley Feeds had approximately 300 customers, and three bargeloads of the contaminated feed were involved.

At one point, more than 80 dairy herds were quarantined, over several states, including Oklahoma, Missouri, and Arkansas. Dairy products processed from this milk were recalled. Beef products, possibly from this area, were sampled for possible contamination. The heptachlor lodges in the animal's fat cells, and takes up to two years to flush out, meantime tainting her milk.

The total amount needed to indemnify the affected farms is in the range of \$4-6 million. As of April, only \$95,000 was in the federal indemnification fund. Congressional authorization is needed for more.

Eighteen of the dairy farmers, who are members of the Mid-Am section of Associated Milk Producers, Inc. (AMPI), report that during February they marketed \$125,000 worth of milk. If it takes only two years for the heptachlor levels to drop to below tolerance, their total income loss will over \$1.5 million, for just the 18 farmers. The April 25 Mid-Am newsletter said, “Having to dump their milk, not being able to sell their contaminated cattle, and being threatened with lawsuits by animal welfarists, the dairymen have no income; nor do they have hope for any for months.”