

China Sentences 113 in Tainted Pork Scandal

the Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — More than 100 people, including over a dozen Chinese government employees, have been sentenced over chemical-laced pork that caused a food safety scandal earlier this year, state media said Saturday. One person was given the death penalty.

An investigation into the safety of pork was launched in March after several farms in central Henan province were found using the fat-burning drug clenbuterol — a banned chemical that makes pork leaner but can be harmful to humans — in pig feed. A subsidiary of Shuanghui Group, China's largest meat processor, was one company selling tainted pork.

A total of 113 people have received sentences ranging from jail terms to the death penalty with a reprieve, Xinhua News Agency said, citing Henan's higher people's court. A statement on the court's website said trials involving 59 cases and 114 people had finished, but gave no details.

Of the 113 punished, 77 were either producers or sellers of clenbuterol or government employees, Xinhua said.

The China Daily newspaper said that 60 had produced or sold clenbuterol and 17 had worked for government departments.

Xinhua said the main culprit, Liu Xiang, was convicted of harming public safety and sentenced to death with a two-year reprieve, meaning the execution will be delayed for two years. Such sentences usually are commuted to life in prison if the prisoner shows good behavior.

Liu ran a clandestine workshop in Henan's Xiangyang city that produced clenbuterol, Xinhua said, adding that his collaborator, Xi Zhongjie, was sentenced to life.

The pair invested 50,000 yuan (\$8,000) each in producing clenbuterol in 2007 and sold the chemical to pig dealers.

By March, they had made 6.4 million yuan after selling more than 6,000 pounds (2,700 kilograms) of the chemical, which spread to eight provinces, including some in eastern China.

Xinhua said most of the remaining 77 producers and sellers and government employees involved in the scandal — including animal health inspectors and food safety officials — received convictions for negligence of duty and abuse of power. Most were given sentences of three to nine years.

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The court sentenced 36 pig farmers to probation or jail terms of less than a year.

Clenbuterol, known in China simply as "lean meat powder," is banned in the country yet stubbornly continues to pop up in the food supply, laced into animal feed by farmers impatient to get their meat to market and turn a profit.

It can cause nausea, dizziness, headaches and heart palpitations in humans, but pig farmers like to use it because it yields leaner meat, which is more expensive than fatty meat.

Food safety is a sensitive issue in China following scandals in recent years from deadly infant formula to recycled restaurant oil containing potentially deadly molds.

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