

Some Contaminated Melons Came from IN Farm



OWENSVILLE, Ind. (AP) — Health officials say a farm in southwestern Indiana was the source of at least some of the salmonella-contaminated cantaloupe that has made at least 178 people in 21 states ill, but they are still trying to determine whether there are other sources.

Federal and state officials disagree whether it is safe to eat melons from the region. The Food and Drug Administration says consumers should discard any cantaloupes grown there bought on or after July 7 because they are still investigating other possible sources of the outbreak.

Amy Reel, Indiana Department of Health spokeswoman, says the state is recommending cantaloupes from Chamberlain Farms in Owensville be discarded, but melons from other farms are safe to eat as long as they are washed well and people use clean knives and cutting boards.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention late Wednesday identified Chamberlain Farms as a source of the outbreak, which has led to 62 hospitalizations and two deaths.

Shelly Burgess, an FDA spokeswoman, said Thursday that the investigation is still in

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its early stages and that it is too early to say whether all the contaminated fruit could be traced back to the farm.



Tim Chamberlain, who runs the 100-acre Chamberlain Farms, said it stopped producing and distributing cantaloupe on Aug. 16, when the FDA alerted him that the fruit could be tainted.

"We've had no production," he said.

Chamberlain said he doesn't know what might have caused the contamination. John Broadhead, an attorney for the farm, said it voluntarily withdrew its cantaloupes last week and that all of its retail and wholesale purchasers complied with the recall.

"We're waiting for the government agencies to tell us what to do," he said.

The farm, which is about 20 miles north of Evansville, sold cantaloupes to grocery stores in four southwestern Indiana counties and one in southeastern Illinois, Broadhead said in a statement. The fruit also was sold to wholesale purchasers in St. Louis; Owensboro, Ky.; Peru, Ill., and Durant, Iowa.

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Burgess said it isn't known how many cantaloupes the farm sold since people started getting sick. Investigators traced the salmonella back to Chamberlain Farms through two cantaloupes at an IGA grocery store in Kentucky, Reel said.

Salmonella is one of the most common causes of food poisoning in the U.S. and can contaminate a wide range of foods, including eggs, meat, unpasteurized dairy products and juices, raw melon and alfalfa sprouts, nuts and even spices. It causes diarrhea, fever and cramps, and although most people recover without treatment, it can cause serious illness in older people, infants and those with chronic diseases, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Testing on the salmonella found on cantaloupes growing at Chamberlain Farms will be completed next week, Reel said.

Chamberlain said he has had no other problems at the farm since it began operating in 1982. Reel said the state doesn't inspect farms in Indiana, but there were no records of any health problems at Chamberlain Farms.

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Indiana ranked fourth in the nation in cantaloupe production last year. Chamberlain said his farm would be considered medium-sized by Indiana standards.

Indiana University law school Professor Diana Winters, whose research involves the judicial review of health and safety regulations, said the Food Safety Modernization Act was signed into law by President Barack Obama. The act included requirements for new standards for produce farmers.

"It got passed, but it just hasn't been implemented. I think that's frustrating for a lot of people," she said.

Winters said it is difficult for any farm linked to salmonella contamination to survive. For example, federal officials blamed tainted processing equipment and water at a Colorado cantaloupe farm for a listeriosis outbreak that killed 30 people last year. The farm filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in May.

"I think once a farm is identified they have an uphill climb ahead of them because there most likely be a lot of personal injury claims against them that they will need cash flow to settle. They're also going to have trouble marketing their produce," she said.

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