Lasagna Products Contained 60 Percent Horsemeat

CASSANDRA VINOGRAD,Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Some beef lasagna products recalled from British stores contained more than 60 percent horsemeat, U.K. food safety authorities said Thursday. It was the latest revelation in a growing scandal surrounding the use of horsemeat and the mislabeling of meat products in Europe.

Frozen-food company Findus recalled the beef lasagna meals earlier this week after French supplier Comigel raised concerns that the products didn't "conform to specification." The U.K. Food Standards Agency said the lasagnas were tested as part of an ongoing investigation into mislabeled meat.

Already this month, millions of burgers have been taken off shop shelves as it emerged that beef products from three companies in Ireland and Britain contained horse DNA.

Eighteen beef lasagna products were tested by Findus, which found that 11 contained horsemeat in the 60 to 100 percent range, the Food Standards Agency said. It would not say if any of the meals were 100 percent horsemeat.

The agency said there's no evidence yet of a food safety risk, but added that tests have been ordered on the lasagna to see if it contains the veterinary drug phenylbutazone. Animals treated with phenylbutazone are not allowed to enter the food chain because it may pose a risk to human health, the agency added.

People who had purchased the meals were advised not to eat them but to return the products to the shops they were bought from.

Eating horsemeat is not generally a health risk, but the recent incidents have triggered disgust in Britain and Ireland, where horsemeat is not traditionally eaten. They also have raised fears over food security and labeling along the supply chain.

The revelations have shaken Ireland in particular, because beef exports are a key industry. Irish government officials and an Irish meat company have blamed meat imported from Poland, but Polish authorities say they have found no evidence backing those claims.

Findus UK apologized to customers and said it was confident it has "full resolved" the supply-chain issue. "We understand this it is a very sensitive subject for consumers and we would like to reassure you we have reacted immediately," the company said.

Catherine Brown, chief executive of the U.K. Food Standards Agency, said that

following its investigations into Findus, the agency is demanding more comprehensive meat testing from the food business "in order to demonstrate that the food it sells and serves is what it says it is on the label."

"We are demanding that food businesses conduct authenticity tests on all beef products, such as beef burgers, meatballs and lasagna, and provide the results to the FSA. The tests will be for the presence of significant levels of horsemeat," she said in a statement.

Comigel earlier this week had advised Findus — and the store chain Aldi — to remove frozen beef lasagna from store shelves. Supermarket chain Tesco also decided to withdraw its spaghetti bolognese, which was produced by Comigel.

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