

Official: Tainted eggs won't enter mainland

Eggs tainted by the pesticide fipronil in Europe do not pose a threat to the Chinese mainland, as no European countries have approval to send eggs or egg products here, the Ministry of Agriculture said on Thursday.

China maintains strict supervision over the use of pesticides, and forbids the use of fipronil in poultry farming, Jin Fazhong, the ministry's deputy director for agricultural product quality and safety supervision, said at a news conference.

The eggs in question originated in the Netherlands and were exported to as many as 16 European countries and Hong Kong. Millions of chicken eggs have been pulled from European and Hong Kong supermarket shelves as a result of the fipronil scare.

The ministry "will intensify supervision and control of pesticides and veterinary drugs to ensure they are used safely in agricultural production" and it "will ensure the safety of agricultural products at the source", Jin said.

Agricultural product quality and safety in China has improved steadily over the past five years, with more than 96 percent of products passing national standards in each of the past five years, said Guang Defu, director of the ministry's agricultural product quality and safety supervision.

In the first half of this year, inspection results showed 97.6 percent of agricultural products met quality and safety standards, a rise of 0.4 percentage points over the same period last year, he said.

By comparison, in 2001 only about 60 percent of vegetables, meat and aquatic products in the domestic market met standards, he said.

Food containing melamine, a toxic substance that can make dairy products appear to have more protein, has met standards for eight consecutive years, he said.

Melamine was at the center of a food safety scandal in 2008 in China, when infant formula produced by Sanlu Group, then a leading dairy company, was found to contain a large amount. Six babies died.

Over the past five years, agricultural authorities have launched various special campaigns to catch violators, focusing on the use of banned pesticides, veterinary drugs and illegal additives in fresh milk. Punishments have been handed down in 238,000 cases, Guang said.

Luo Yunbo, a professor of food safety at China Agricultural University, said more legislation is needed in the production and use of agricultural products, with more severe punishments for violations.

He also said the authorities should roll out more measures encouraging farmers to use environmentally friendly pesticides, such as raising the prices of highly toxic pesticides and providing subsidies to manufacturers of effective pesticides that have lower toxicity.