

## FIPRINOL IN EGGS

It is illegal to use this material anywhere in the food chain. It is, however, cleared for use on cats and dogs for external application to control fleas and other insect pests.

Fiprinol was found in eggs that were produced in the Netherlands. As that country is 300% self-sufficient in eggs, very large quantities are exported. A problem there, very soon becomes a problem across Europe.

One of the most economically damaging hen welfare problems in the poultry industry is the presence of 'red mite'. This is a minute parasite that hides in crevices during the day and then, at night, emerges to crawl up the birds' legs to suck blood from any blood vessel they can find. Indeed, they suck so much blood it gives them a red appearance, hence the name.

This causes intense irritation to the birds, weakens them, makes them prone to succumbing to other problems and, of course, causes them to produce fewer eggs. If it wasn't for red mite, the UK could manage with 20% fewer laying hens.

Every egg producer is, therefore, always on the lookout for the miracle cure. There are many materials that will easily kill this mite, but they can have side effects and can also persist in the body of the hen for a long period, finding their way into a newly forming egg. Such materials are banned from use in the poultry industry. The insecticides that may be used in the presence of the birds are obviously less effective, and need to be used very frequently. They are not applied to the bird, but to the surfaces where the red mite resides during the day.

There are many 'snake oil salesmen' who claim to have a perfectly legal and perfectly natural cure for red mite, and many producers are tempted to try these out when the house is cleared of birds every 14 months.

Fiprinol and organo-phosphorous materials, however, must not be used.

There is a fully EU legal material called 'Deja 16', manufactured by a Dutch firm in the Netherlands, for the control of red mite. This firm, for reasons that have

yet to be made public, sub-contracted the manufacture of their own product to a company in Belgium. This Belgian company used Fiprinol in other products where it is legal, such as control of fleas in cats and dogs. They would have been aware of its toxicity because cat formulations must be far less concentrated (cats lick themselves thoroughly and frequently).

Somehow, Fiprinol was allowed to adulterate the Deja 16. Furthermore, this error seems to have gone unnoticed for some time. Egg producers purchasing Deja 16 may have been pleasantly surprised at how well it worked against red mite and word would have got round that this was *the* material to use.

It is obviously a highly persistent material; we understand that it was used in sheds that were 'between flocks' on the 14-month laying cycle. A week or so later, the new 16-week old birds would have arrived and been housed for four weeks before they started laying. Chickens peck, rather than lick, and I am puzzled as to how the birds managed to ingest enough for it to get into the newly forming egg. This could only be remotely possible if the Deja 16 was a powder as opposed to a solution. Even if it was a powder, the birds would have brushed it through the slats with their wings and bodies, long before they started laying eggs. I am still trying to discover what the formulation is.

Fiprinol in eggs was first discovered in Belgium. The Belgian authorities were very slow to inform the EU. Had they made this known earlier, many of the 200 egg producing sites that have been closed down in the Netherlands would not now be in this situation.

Fortunately, because of the weakness of the Pound against the Euro, the UK is importing fewer eggs from the EU that might have been the case 18 months ago.

Apparently 700,000 potentially affected eggs did come to the UK from the Netherlands, but they would now be past their sell-by date.

90% of eggs produced in the UK are produced under the 'Lion Code' scheme, where producers are closely monitored in the management of their birds. The eggs are stamped with the registration number of the producer.

Despite the so called Single Market, Fiprinol is not recognised by our Health and Safety Executive as being safe to use. It has not been allocated an HSE Number

and it is, therefore, illegal to handle it. This is not the only example of double standards within the EU.

These advantages can make all the difference in an industry where margins are wafer thin, and UK caterers (as opposed to most retailers, who require traceability) will happily buy from the cheapest source. Every now and again we reap the reward of this when a salmonella outbreak is traced back to imported Spanish eggs used in our catering industry.

The message is simple. If you buy eggs look for the little Red Lion. If you use a caterer, insist they do the same.

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