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LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE 2017 FIPRONIL-CONTAMINATION INCIDENT IN DUTCH EGGS

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Fipronil is a pesticide, mostly used to control invertebrate pests on dogs and cats and in crops. Restrictions on crop use in Europe are due to concerns regarding adverse effects in non-target species, including bees. Treatment of animal facilities, such as laying hen stables is therefore illegal in Europe. Fipronil-contaminated eggs, first reported in Belgium in June of 2017, triggered an investigation that led to the discovery of widespread fipronil-contamination in Dutch eggs, linked to the illegal use of fipronil in a cleaning product used to control mites. Restrictions were imposed on the movement of eggs, meat and manure from contaminated farms, large numbers of eggs were destroyed, and contaminated farms needed to demonstrate contamination-free

status before restrictions could be lifted. The financial losses were substantial. Controversy related to the incident revolve around an apparent lack of regulatory action following an earlier report of illegal fipronil use on chicken farms, and assessments of the toxicological risks to humans consuming affected eggs that indicated minimal risk. Public fears were enhanced by widespread news reports designed to cause concern. The incident illuminated limitations in the standard risk assessment procedures used by regulators, and the consequences of inaccurate and sensationalist media reports related to public health concerns.

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