



ACCREDITATION PROVIDES STRONG DATA TO TAKE ACTION ON CONTAMINATED PET FOOD



Animal food testing laboratories are working diligently to protect animals and humans, conducting surveillance testing on various raw animal food products to intercept contaminated products before they cause illness. This routine testing has resulted in several positive findings in laboratories around the country (see references). While various animal food manufacturers have voluntarily recalled their products out of an abundance of caution, some have questioned laboratory results.

Nebraska Department of Agriculture

The Nebraska Department of Agriculture (NDA) Laboratory had their testing questioned by a company whose raw animal food product tested positive for *Salmonella* in a random sampling. The company alleged that, since only one sample was positive while four subsequent samples were negative, the initial sample must have been cross-contaminated at some point in the analysis. Given its ISO/IEC 17025 accreditation status and rigorous testing standards, NDA was able to refute the company's allegations.

The laboratory emphasized that the inspector who collected the sample and the laboratory personnel who conducted the testing used appropriate chain of custody procedures. No other testing was performed in the laboratory at the same time to reduce the risk of cross-contamination. Positive and negative controls were used to confirm that the testing was performed properly. Molecular subtyping (performed by the Nebraska Public Health Laboratory) confirmed the sample culture as *Salmonella* Cerro, with the laboratory utilizing *Salmonella* Arizonae as its positive control. Sally Flowers, laboratory administrator for NDA, said "Being accredited to ISO/IEC 17025 means that an independent expert has visited our lab, evaluated our work first-hand, and is vouching for our ability to test in a consistent, competent manner that is free from outside influences."

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Colorado Department of Agriculture

The Colorado Department of Agriculture (CDA) Biochemistry Laboratory regularly conducts surveillance on raw animal food, and recently faced intense scrutiny over test results confirming *Salmonella* in a raw animal food sample. The company questioned the validity of CDA's results and claimed that the *Salmonella* strain found in the sample was non-pathogenic to humans and did not warrant a recall. However, the CDA Biochemistry Laboratory has been ISO/IEC 17025-accredited since 2008 and was ready to defend its results thanks to rigorous documentation and technical experience.

Kristina McCallum, deputy laboratory manager at the CDA Biochemistry Laboratory, understands the importance of her laboratory's accreditation when facing these critics. "While the benefits of obtaining ISO/IEC 17025 accreditation are widely understood and accepted by analytical laboratories worldwide, being accredited can be especially critical in a regulatory laboratory. The CDA Biochemistry Laboratory has witnessed these benefits first-hand with recent pathogen detection findings in animal food. These results have led to many open record requests by manufacturers and journalists. Having consistent, concise documentation has helped to ensure that our laboratory data packets are accepted by the US Food and Drug Administration for possible follow-up investigations."

An accredited laboratory is recognized to be capable of producing accurate and defensible data. When its data are called into question, it is very easy for the laboratory to produce records, standard operating procedures, analyst training records and other documentation proving that the data can be trusted. As Flowers and McCallum have attested, this defensibility was crucial to protecting the reputation of their laboratories and ensuring that contaminated raw animal food was removed from commerce.

References

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