

# E. coli outbreak: German farm in Uelzen 'likely source'

Farm in northern Germany has been identified as the most likely source of many of the infections in the E. coli outbreak that has left 22 people dead

The farm, producing bean sprouts, is located in Uelzen, south of Hamburg, the epicentre of the outbreak that has also made more than 2,000 people ill. German officials were awaiting results of tests on the farm's produce that would offer more conclusive proof. The farm has been closed and Germans advised to stop eating bean sprouts. The Agriculture Minister for Lower Saxony, Gert Lindemann, said, "Further evidence has emerged which points to a plant nursery in Uelzen as the source of the EHEC cases, or at least one of the sources."

Definite proof would depend on test results, but 'a connection has been found involving all the main outbreaks'. The farm is about 100km south of Hamburg and supplies restaurants and markets in the city and neighbouring German states. Mr. Lindemann said the farm grows a wide variety of bean sprouts from seeds imported from different countries. The bean sprouts include adzuki, alfalfa, broccoli, peas, lentils and mung beans, all grown in the nursery for consumption in salads. Mr. Lindemann said the sprouts produced there are grown in temperatures of about 38C, 'which is ideal for all bacteria.'

The announcement may cause



A trader arranges cucumbers at his stall

embarrassment to German authorities, who had earlier pointed to Spanish farms as the source of the outbreak. More than 2,150 people in Germany have been infected by enterohaemorrhagic E. coli (EHEC) bacteria. Many have developed haemolytic-uremic syndrome (HUS), which can be fa-

tal. Cases have been concentrated in Hamburg, with infections in 12 other countries linked to travel in Germany. 21 of the victims have died in Germany, and one person in Sweden.

Scientists say the new E. coli strain is an aggressive hybrid form toxic to humans and not previously

linked to food poisoning. German Health Minister Daniel Bahr said it was not yet safe to give the all clear. "We still have to expect more cases of HUS. We continue to recommend that people do not eat raw tomatoes, cucumbers and lettuce in northern Germany," he said.

## Customs seize 451 turtles in suitcases

**Thai customs has found 451 turtles worth \$33,000 stashed in suitcases offloaded from a passenger flight from Bangladesh, the latest seizure of live creatures at Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport**

Turtles of varying sizes apiece in Thai markets, and seven false gavials, a type of freshwater crocodile, were found in small bags packed into cases after authorities received a tip off that a known trafficker was on his way to Thailand. The alleged trafficker, a Bangladeshi national, did not collect the luggage and fled on arrival in Bangkok, customs officials said. The discovery was the biggest since September last year, when 1,140 turtles were found by customs on a single day.

Thailand, which borders four countries, has seen its fair share of illegal wildlife trafficking and customs officials at Suvarnabhumi often seize reptiles and small animals in luggage. They found a two month old tiger cub in a bag last August, which was concealed by stuffed tiger toys and bound for Iran.

The market, which operates on weekends only, generates as much as \$33m a month from some 350,000 foreign and local shoppers, according to the State Railway of Thailand. Although Thailand has been at the forefront of a regional effort to combat wildlife trafficking, the country's multiple airports, sea ports and road network make it a major transit point for other destinations.

## Call to decriminalise drugs

**The global war on drugs has failed, a group of past and present world leaders said**

The report, by the Global Commission for Drug Policy, says criminalisation has cost millions and has only succeeded in fuelling organised crime. British entrepreneur Sir Richard Branson said drug users should no longer be treated

as criminals. "I think what the commission would like is for European countries to experiment," he said. "We won't lock people up who take marijuana in fact lets have some European countries regulate marijuana."

Former Colombian President Cesar Gaviria said harm reduction policies have been generally

successful. "There are alternatives to the policy of total prohibition," he noted. The US, Mexican and British governments have rejected the report's findings. Mr. Branson was a member of the commission panel, which also included former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou.

## China rejects Gmail spying claims

**China has rejected allegations of involvement in a cyber-spying campaign targeting the Google e-mail accounts of top US officials, military personnel and journalists**

A Foreign Ministry spokesman said it was 'unacceptable' to blame China. Google has not blamed the Chinese Government directly, but says the hacking campaign originated in Jinan. The US company said its security was not breached but indicated individuals' passwords were obtained through fraud. Chinese political activists and officials in other Asian countries were also targeted, Google said.

It is extremely difficult for analysts to determine whether governments or individuals are responsible for such attacks. But the fact that the victims were people with access to sensitive —

even secret — information raises the possibility that this was cyber-espionage rather than cyber-crime. However, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei said, "Blaming these misdeeds on China is unacceptable. Hacking is an international problem and



A couple cycle past the logo of Google

China is also a victim. The claims of so-called support for hacking are completely unfounded and have ulterior motives."

Google said it had 'detected

and has disrupted' a campaign to take users' passwords and monitor their e-mails. "We have notified victims and secured their accounts," said the company. "In addition, we have notified relevant government authorities." The e-mail scam uses a practice known as 'spear phishing' in which specific e-mail users are tricked into divulging their login credentials to a web page that resembles Google's Gmail web service (or which appears related to the target's work) but is in fact run by hackers. Having obtained the user's e-mail login and password, the hackers then tell Gmail's service to forward incoming e-mail to another account set up by the hacker. The White House said it was investigating the reports but did not believe official US Government e-mail accounts had been breached.

## Greece default risk at 50:50 says Moody's



A woman hits a frying pan as she protests in front of the Parliament

**Greece's credit rating cut again by rating agency Moody's**

Moody's cut its rating by three notches from B1 to Caa1 — just five notches short of default. The new rating means Greece is 50 percent likely to default on or restructure its debts in the next five years. Meanwhile, Athens is completing the negotiations for drawing down the fifth tranche of its 110bn Euro bail-out from the EU and International Monetary Fund. The Chairman of the Group of Eurozone Finance Ministers, Jean-Claude Juncker, said that the IMF may not approve the latest cash advance unless Greece could convince them it will remain solvent over the next 12 months.

Announcing the latest downgrade, Moody's said, "The first trigger for today's downgrade is Moody's view that Greece is increasingly likely to fail to stabilise its debt ratios within the timeframe set by previously announced fiscal consolidation plans." It maintained a negative outlook on the rating, implying that further downgrades may follow. The Greek Finance Ministry blamed the rating cut on press rumours, claiming Moody's had failed to take account of its austerity commitments for the current year. European policymakers, led by Mr. Juncker, have been pushing the idea of a voluntary postponement of repayments on Greece's shorter-term debts, to be agreed with lenders.

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