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**Food Minister Ned O'Keeffe's home**

# Call on O'Keeffe to resign over bonemeal

**By RALPH RIEGEL**

FOOD Minister Ned O'Keeffe last night faced calls for his resignation after the revelation that meat and bonemeal, linked to BSE in cattle, is being fed to pigs on his £7m-plus north Cork family farm.

The feeds - while perfectly legal - are in breach of a high-profile Galtee Meats quality assurance scheme under which the O'Keeffe farm supplies pig meat in Mitchelstown.

This latest controversy emerged days before the Government planned a flagship Budget to consolidate its political recovery.

But opposition parties seized on the disclosures and demanded that Mr O'Keeffe provide a full and detailed account of the situation.

Last night Labour leader Ruairi Quinn said they would be referring the issue to the Public Offices Commission.

He challenged the minister to explain why he never disclosed the fact his family farm had one of the 17 licences to use meat and bonemeal during a Dail debate on the issue last week.

A spokesman for Mr O'Keeffe said he was checking all the facts and would issue a further statement. Fine Gael's agriculture spokesman Alan Dukes also called for a full statement. He said Mr O'Keeffe, who has special responsibility for food quality and safety, must give the best possible example to other food producers.

He said any apparent departure from the most rigorous quality controls would seriously affect Mr O'Keeffe's credibility as minister.

Mr O'Keeffe's son now runs the family business which produces more than 50,000 pigs a year. It ranks as one of the largest and most modern piggeries in Ireland.

Meat and bonemeal feeds are perfectly legal for use with sheep, pig and poultry stocks.

The EU Veterinary Committee just last week refused to restrict or recommend a ban on their use to non-bovine stocks.

However, bonemeal feeds fall outside the Galtee quality assurance scheme.

A special licence to produce and store such feeds is required by the Department of Agriculture.

Mr Dukes - a former agriculture minister - warned that feeding bonemeal to pigs, even though it is perfectly legal, breaches the Galtee Meats quality assurance scheme to which the O'Keeffe family farm is a signatory supplier.

A spokesperson for Dairygold, owners of Galtee Meats, was unavailable for comment last night on precise details of the programme.

Last night, Councillor Joe Sherlock (Lab), an outspoken critic of large-scale piggeries, warned that he had asked Mr O'Keeffe to comment on his family farm's position regarding meat and bonemeal as long ago as December 1999.

"I never received a reply. In light of what has now emerged, I feel there is no other option but for Minister O'Keeffe to resign," he added.

Ned O'Keeffe was elected to the Dail in 1981 and secured his first ministerial appointment in 1997 when he was named junior agriculture minister with special responsibility for food.

The colourful North Cork TD is no stranger to controversy, having hit the headlines in 1995 when he called for the New Zealand film about a talking pig Babe to be banned because it could hurt Christmas ham sales.