



**United States  
Department of  
Agriculture**

Marketing and  
Regulatory  
Programs

Animal and Plant  
Health Inspection  
Service

Washington, DC  
20250

Dear Dr. :

This letter is to inform you of developments concerning the single case of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) diagnosed in an animal slaughtered in the State of Washington, United States. We present herein the results of a comprehensive epidemiological investigation and describe additional initiatives taken by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to safeguard human and animal health.

We ask that you review the enclosed information with a view toward evaluating the appropriateness of any remaining trade restrictions on live ruminants and ruminant commodities (including beef, beef products, semen, embryos, hides, milk products and live animals) that were implemented as a result of the single BSE case. The enclosed information demonstrates that trade in ruminant commodities from the United States can occur safely.

As background information, on December 25, 2003, USDA received verification from the Veterinary Laboratories Agency in Weybridge, England, of the finding of BSE in an adult Holstein cow slaughtered in the State of Washington. Since that time, USDA and other Federal and State agencies have worked together closely to perform a full epidemiological investigation, trace any potentially infected cattle, trace potentially contaminated rendered product, increase BSE surveillance, and take additional measures to address human and animal health.

The epidemiological investigation and DNA test results confirm that the infected cow was not indigenous to the United States, but rather was born and became infected in Alberta, Canada. Above and beyond OIE standards, animals with known or potential risk for having been infected with the BSE agent in Canada have been depopulated, as have all progeny from the index cow in the United States. All carcasses were properly disposed of in accordance with Federal, State, and local regulations. Please see enclosure 1 for details of the epidemiological investigation.



*Safeguarding American Agriculture*  
APHIS is an agency of USDA's Marketing and Regulatory Programs

The United States concluded active investigation and culling activities on February 9, 2004, and has redirected resources toward planning, implementing, and enforcing national policy measures to promote BSE surveillance and protect human and animal health. To this end, an international panel of scientific experts appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture has provided a review of U.S. BSE response actions and made recommendations for enhancements of our national program. The report of the international review team is included as enclosure 2.

In summary, the international review team was complimentary of the scope, thoroughness, and appropriateness of the epidemiological investigation, and concluded that the investigation conformed to international standards. The review team members concurred that the investigation should be terminated and made several key policy recommendations. USDA and HHS have already taken significant actions to address these recommendations, many of which build on mitigation measures that were previously in place.

Details of U.S. actions in response to the recommendations of the review team are included in enclosure 3. In summary, the response actions have focused on (1) preventing inclusion of specified risk materials (SRM) in human food and ruminant feed, (2) enhancing targeted and passive BSE surveillance systems, (3) improving traceability through a comprehensive national animal identification system, and (4) reinforcing educational and outreach efforts. Policies and procedures already implemented by USDA and HHS directly address these issues.

For example, USDA has implemented a new BSE surveillance plan (announced March 15, 2004) that involves testing as many samples as possible from the cattle population at highest risk for BSE, as well as random sampling of 20,000 clinically normal, aged slaughter cattle. As part of this plan, screening tests will be conducted by a network of public laboratories using licensed rapid tests for BSE. Additional testing will be conducted as necessary by USDA's National Veterinary Services Laboratories, which remains the national reference laboratory of the United States.

The new surveillance plan also includes enhanced educational and outreach efforts to strengthen passive surveillance for BSE and ensure continued access to the target cattle population. Of note is the fact that the international review team has reviewed the surveillance plan and indicated that it is comprehensive and science-based, and that it addresses the important issues with regard to BSE surveillance in cattle. Please see enclosure 4 for details of the BSE surveillance plan.

In addition, USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) has implemented regulations that designate brain, skull, eyes, trigeminal ganglia, spinal cord, vertebral column and dorsal root ganglia from cattle over 30 months of age and tonsils and the small intestine from cattle of all ages as SRMs and prohibit their use in the human food supply. Mechanically separated beef is now banned from use as human food. Beef produced through advanced meat recovery systems is also prohibited from the human food supply if it contains central nervous system tissue. Moreover, all non-ambulatory cattle are condemned at slaughter and prevented from entering the human food chain. FSIS verifies and enforces compliance with these regulations through inspection activities and product testing.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA), which regulates animal feed, has announced its intent to publish an interim final rule that makes some changes to the current feed ban. They intend to eliminate the exemptions that allow the use of blood products and plate waste in ruminant feed. In addition, they plan to prohibit the use of poultry litter in ruminant feed and to require the use of dedicated facilities in handling prohibited products.

The actions of the United States are consistent with international standards recommended by the OIE with regard to BSE. Indeed, the mitigation measures in place in the United States exceed the OIE requirements for provisionally free status for BSE. USDA appreciates the significant contributions of the OIE to science-based understanding of the true BSE-related risks in international trade, and will continue to work with the OIE and other relevant international organizations. The United States is also taking a leadership role by proposing standards for low-risk product trade with countries that have a low incidence of BSE and historically strong risk mitigation measures.

We are providing this information to you in the interests of transparency and to offer maximum assurances regarding the safety of U.S. cattle and beef. We trust that it will be helpful in allowing you to modify any remaining trade measures to reflect the results of the investigation and the effects of our newly adopted measures. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can provide any further information to support the resumption of trade in ruminant commodities between our countries.

Thank you for your consideration of this information.

Sincerely,

W. Ron DeHaven  
Deputy Administrator  
Veterinary Services

Enclosures (4)