

***BSE in the United States:
Useful Information for Dairy Producers
Provided by National Cattlemen's Beef Association***

Regarding Disposition of Downed Animals

USDA's announcement on December 29, 2003, that it is banning all downed animals from the human food supply is a measure taken out of an abundance of caution and adds an additional level of safeguard. NCBA previously had expressed concerns about condemning all downed animals because this could affect the scope of the BSE surveillance program if downed animals could not be sent to slaughter facilities. However, given assurance by USDA that it has developed a good plan for continued surveillance, NCBA is supportive of this additional step. NCBA will work with USDA to ensure the surveillance program remains effective.

Concern about infectivity of muscle meat

USDA provided the following explanation of the safety of muscle meat in its Dec. 29 briefing: The global community has been dealing with BSE since the 1980s and in the past 15 years there have been quite a variety of studies looking at BSE-infected cattle — specifically some studies where cattle were experimentally infected with BSE. In those high infection studies, the BSE agent was not found to be located in the muscle meat. In naturally infected cattle the exposure is even lower than in the experiments. The clinical studies tell us there is virtually zero risk for BSE in the meat; thus, NCBA is confident that the US supply of beef remains safe. Nevertheless, out of an abundance of caution, an understanding of the public interest, and in the interest of protecting the public health, the decision was made to recall the meat from the BSE index animal.

Poultry Litter

Although processed poultry litter has been used for more than 30 years and has been shown to be safe as a nutrient supplement in cattle feed, NCBA policy encourages cattle producers to seek alternatives to poultry litter as cattle feed, and discourages the use of poultry litter in cattle feed.

Ruminant material fed to swine and poultry

Science has shown that swine and poultry do not get BSE and that ruminant meat and bone meal used as a protein supplement in the feed for those animals does not present a risk. Further, analysis in countries with very high BSE infectivity has shown that this is not a pathway that can transmit the disease.

Blood infectivity

Extensive research to date has not found that bovine blood is infective. As a result, the Food and Drug Administration does not classify blood meal, a high source of protein, as a prohibited material for animal feed.

Animal Identification is different from Country of Origin Labeling

There is some confusion about these programs. They are two very different programs with two very different goals. Some of the confusion arises due to the lack of information about how producers are supposed to comply with a mandatory country of origin labeling program. Given the civil penalties associated with the law, it is obvious some form of verification will be needed. This has been interpreted in some circles as a need for an animal identification system, even though the law prohibits the Secretary of Agriculture from implementing animal ID to achieve country of origin labeling.

National Animal Identification System

The Food Animal Identification Task Force, which is part of the national animal ID initiative, developed a National Identification Work Plan that was approved as a work in progress by the U.S. Animal Health Association in October 2003. The Task Force believes establishing premises IDs will be necessary to facilitate a trace-back investigation so the animal's origin and movement can be tracked.

NCBA, along with other species groups and USDA, have been working to create a national animal ID system. NCBA has called for accelerating the timeline to create and implement a national animal ID system and supports USDA's announcement today to accelerate the program.

The purpose of the ID system is to protect herd health and facilitate a trace-back investigation in the event of a disease outbreak. The goal is to be able to accomplish a rapid trace to the farm of origin within 48 hours.

At this time it is premature for producers to contract with any company (such as a data base management provider) that claims to be a "certified" provider of any component of the national ID program.

The ongoing development of the national ID plan can be followed at www.usaip.info <<http://www.usaip.info/>> .

Country of Origin Labeling

Country of Origin labeling is a marketing program. It is not a food safety program nor is it an animal identification program. The proposed rule for mandatory country of origin labeling specifically prohibits the Secretary of Agriculture from implementing an animal ID system to accomplish this.

Even if country of origin labeling was in place at the time of the BSE incident in Washington State, it wouldn't have changed how the beef was processed or handled.

The National Cattlemen's Beef Association believes that all beef that is sold must be inspected and safe for human consumption. Country of Origin labeling does nothing to enhance this process.

The U.S. current position on exports vis-à-vis our ban on Canadian beef

When a foreign animal disease is discovered in any country, the typical reaction is for its trading partners to temporarily suspend trade until a full investigation can be completed. This is not a mandate of any international or governmental body, but simply a prudent practice for countries to protect their public and animal health. Upon completion of an investigation, the science surrounding the issue should dictate the resumption of trade.

In the case of Canada, the United States temporarily suspended all trade until an investigation could be completed. The science surrounding the issue has dictated and will continue to dictate the U.S.'s actions to resume trade with Canada. In fact, the U.S. has been importing Canadian boneless boxed beef from animals under 30 months of age since September. NCBA has requested that USDA extend the comment period on the proposed rule for the importation of live cattle from Canada until the current investigation is complete. Similarly, the U.S. calls for the use of science in the prompt reestablishment of trade with our trading partners.

Additional information can be found on www.BSEinfo.org <<http://www.bseinfo.org/>>

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