

UPDATE ON BOVINE SPONGIFORM ENCEPHALOPATHY (BSE)

Statement by Canada at the meeting held on 24-25 June 2003

Background

1. On 20 May 2003, Canada announced a confirmed case of BSE in a single Canadian cow. The case was detected as part of Canada's active, targeted BSE surveillance program. The discovery was evidence that the Canadian system works. Based on the results of our investigation to date, Canada can say with confidence that this is an isolated case and that the Canadian food supply remains safe. We dedicated all the necessary resources to undertake a comprehensive and thorough investigation.
2. Canada is open and willing to discuss the results of our investigation and to work with all Members to ease restrictions on Canadian products, based on risk and sound scientific principles.

Results of our investigation

3. Rather than go into detailed results of Canada's investigation in this venue, I will just touch briefly on some of the salient points. We have maintained a completely open and public process during the investigation. I would encourage WTO Members to consult the details on the Canadian Food Inspection Agency website.
4. We conducted a thorough and systematic analysis along three lines. These included:
 - a trace back - where the cow had been in its life;
 - a trace forward - where its offspring went; and
 - a feed investigation - where the rendered products of the cow may have been consumed and what feed sources the cow may have been exposed to during its life.
5. We placed 18 farms under quarantine. These quarantines have all been lifted. We tested all animal samples from all three lines of investigation. The test results - over 2,000 - were all negative. The negative test results mean that the incidence of BSE in Canada remains confined to one cow. And no meat from the cow entered the human food chain.
6. Based on our investigation, we are confident that the Canadian food supply remains safe and that our system is effective and sensitive - just as it was designed. An enormous amount of work was accomplished in a very short time and our investigation is now complete. International experts invited to Canada in early June agree that the Canadian investigation has reached its maximum potential.

International review team

7. The international team was composed of four international BSE experts that had some previous knowledge of the Canadian system. The experts were not chosen for their affiliation with any particular country or government, but rather their recognition as international experts. The team consisted of Professor Ulrich Kihm, Professor Will Houston, Dr. Dagmar Heim and Dr. Stuart McDiarmid.

8. Canada considers itself fortunate to have obtained the input and advice of such recognized experts from the international public and animal health community. Canada requested that the panel examine two specific areas.

- (a) First, we asked that they review the approaches and techniques we have used in our investigation.
- (b) Secondly, Canada requested the team to review the proposed future policy approaches that Canada is considering in order to further strengthen its inspection system.

9. The international expert review team has praised the effectiveness of our investigation. The team was rigorous in its queries with our epidemiological team and they have validated our findings and concurred that the active investigation stage has achieved its maximum potential. It has also recommended some regulatory adjustments to the already effective Canadian system, which we are considering. This report is now close to completion. Through Canadian Embassies, we will be distributing final copies of this report to all countries. It will also be available on the CFIA website, and we would naturally invite all countries to review this report. In addition to reviewing Canada's investigation and next steps, the international team praised Canada for its transparent approach and likened Canada's handling of this case as a model to be emulated.

International outreach

10. On the international front, we have worked hard to communicate with all countries in an open, transparent, and comprehensive manner. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency website was updated on a daily basis with detailed information about the investigation and background on Canada's policies and procedures.

11. At the time of the confirmation of BSE in Canada, Canada's Chief Veterinary Officer was at the Office international des Epizooties (OIE) General Session in Paris. Canada took the opportunity to advise the international veterinary community first-hand of the developments. Canadian Embassies around the world met with the veterinary services of foreign governments to provide information about the BSE diagnosis and our investigation. Canadian officials also held briefing sessions for all interested diplomatic missions in Ottawa.

12. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all countries who offered assistance and expertise to Canada. These gestures are very much appreciated. In particular, United States epidemiologists and veterinary officials assisted us in our investigation. In addition, the United Kingdom offered its assistance and, in particular, its world reference laboratory at Weybridge provided prompt confirmation of our diagnosis as well as subsequent testing services.

OIE exemptions for certain products

13. As you know, the OIE makes specific reference to a list of products which countries should authorize without BSE-related restrictions, regardless of a country's BSE status. This list includes commodities such as milk and milk products, semen and embryos, hides and skins. Fortunately, most WTO Members have not prohibited such products from Canada, recognizing the international scientific consensus that these products do not pose a risk of transmission of BSE. However, some WTO Members have suspended imports of products from Canada that are clearly outside of the OIE guidelines. We are disappointed by this reaction and have contacted such governments directly, urging them to review these actions, based on scientific evidence and international consensus.

Products presenting no defined risk or negligible risk

14. In addition to the products exempted by the OIE, we are also asking WTO Members to remove from the scope of their import measures, products, which according to well established and internationally recognized science, present no defined risk or a negligible risk, within Canada's current regulatory framework. This includes, but is not limited to:

- veal calves less than 36 weeks old for immediate slaughter;
- bovine animals less than 30 months for immediate slaughter;
- bovine meat from animals less than 30 months of age;
- sheep and goats for immediate slaughter and meat therefrom;
- wild caribou and muskox; and
- non-ruminant pet food.

15. I want to make it very clear that our requests to trading partners to re-establish quickly trade in OIE-exempt products and negligible risk products is solidly based on science and should not be connected in any way to any changes to Canadian regulatory policy.

Conclusion

16. We are proud of the fact that our system worked. As I mentioned earlier, following Canadian regulatory policy, no meat from the case animal entered the human food chain. We are confident in the thoroughness of the investigation and our continued ability to protect the health of the Canadian public and produce safe products for export.

17. In summary:

- Our investigation, which we carried out in a very open and transparent manner, supports the fact that our system in Canada is fundamentally sound;
- Our comprehensive investigation has revealed no additional occurrences;
- International experts have validated our investigation and the integrity of our system; and
- We are committed to looking at any improvements necessary to further strengthen our system.

18. We would ask all countries to review the details of our investigation and officials accompanying me from Ottawa would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

19. We also request that trading partners that have temporarily suspended imports from Canada, lift these restrictions quickly on OIE-exempt products and low-risk products. I have given you a few examples of what these products are.

20. We will continue to work closely with all of you to re-establish trade on scientific and risk-based principles.
