



Questions and Answers
Case of BSE in U.S. / Washington State

Q.1 Is there a risk to human health from the case of BSE identified in the United States?

A.1 Current information indicates that the BSE case in the United States does not pose a health risk to Canadians.

To date, our investigation has shown that no meat from this animal entered the Canadian food system. The measures announced on December 24, 2003, to restrict the entry of meat products provides further safeguards. Should any new information arise we would take the necessary precautionary action to prevent exposure of Canadians to suspect product while realizing that foods generally consumed (e.g., muscle cuts, etc) are not known to transmit the disease.

Q.2 What are Canada's BSE safeguards?

A.2 The Government of Canada has strong safety measures in place to minimize the risks and spread of BSE. The most important of these in terms of public health protection is the removal of specified risk materials (SRMs) from carcasses at slaughter. This measure prevents potentially infectious material from entering the food system. Canadian safeguards also include strict import controls that address both human and animal health concerns, and a ban on the use of ruminant material in ruminant feed.

For a complete list of Canada's BSE safeguards, see the BSE fact sheet:
<http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/anima/heasan/disemala/bseesb/bseesbfse.shtml>

Q.3 What border measures has Canada taken in response to the U.S. case?

A.3 The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) has worked closely with Health Canada to consider the risks of the range of various products that are imported from the U.S. and to determine the appropriate actions necessary to protect public and animal health in Canada. As a precautionary measure, we are implementing limited import restrictions on a range of ruminants and ruminant products from the U.S.

Canada will continue to allow the importation of products and animals which, on the basis of scientific risk assessment and the measures we have put in place, do not pose a risk to human health. These include boneless beef from cattle aged 30 months or less at slaughter, live cattle destined for immediate slaughter (which do not pose a risk due to the removal of SRM at slaughter), dairy products, semen, embryos and protein-free tallow.

The list of import restrictions is available on the CFIA's Web site at www.inspection.gc.ca

Q.4 Other countries have closed their borders to a broad range of U.S. products. Why didn't Canada do the same?

A.4 Canada has taken the necessary measures to protect public health, in the least trade restrictive manner possible and in the same way we would expect to be treated by our trading partners. We have worked very hard over the past number of months with the international community to recognize there are science-based standards that all countries should follow in these situations - standards reflecting the reality that low levels of BSE pose minimal risk to other countries when proper safeguards are in place.

Q.5 Why hasn't Canada taken the same action as the U.S. took six months ago?

A.5 Canada has been adamant that the measures adopted by importing countries should be those required to protect public and animal health and reflect established science-based international standards.

Validated international scientific research indicates that a number of products have been determined not to pose a risk for the transmission of the BSE agent. Therefore, restrictions on such products are not appropriate and have not been imposed by Canada.

Q.6 Did the BSE-infected cow in Washington State originate in Canada?

A.6 It is premature to conclude where the animal originated based on the investigation so far. The U.S. is carrying out a thorough and comprehensive investigation which is in its preliminary stages. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has indicated that an early determination leads them to believe the BSE-infected cow may have been exported from Canada to the U.S. We understand that the U.S. is continuing to pursue multiple lines of investigation. Based on our understanding of the information compiled to date, it would be premature at this time to draw any conclusions. *We are actively supporting the U.S. in their information-gathering efforts, and Canada, as well as the U.S., are both conducting their own DNA testing to jointly arrive at a definitive determination.*

Q.7 If new information indicates the current line of inquiry back to Canada is negative, does that eliminate any link to Canada for this case of BSE?

A.7. Again, it is premature to derive any concise conclusions based on the information gathered to date. New results, whether positive or negative, will determine the next steps in the ongoing investigation, which will continue until all lines of inquiry have been exhausted. Irrespective of the origin of the animal, determining how the animal became infected is an equally if not more important element of the investigation. For this reason a parallel feed source investigation is also under way.

Q.8 What will be the impact on the U.S.'s decision to allow live cattle from Canada to enter the U.S.?

A.8 Given the uncertainty surrounding the origin of the animal and full recognition of the common risk factors within North America, we see no need to reconsider the rule-making process. The U.S. has consistently committed to a science-based approach, and the science supports a lifting of restrictions on the importation of Canadian animals and products, at least to the extent proposed in the current rule-making process in the U.S. Furthermore, recognizing the extensive integration between the Canadian and American markets, we do not expect this new case of BSE to have a significant effect on the U.S. rule.

Q.9 Is Canada being more restrictive in its measures against the U.S. than what we are requesting of our trading partners, including the United States?

A.9 No, Canada's measures are not as restrictive as those applied to Canada by the U.S. and other countries when Canada first detected BSE and was still involved in an active investigation. Canada's new measures on U.S. products are temporary and may be adjusted pending verification of information resulting from the U.S. investigation. These measures are based on existing international standards.

Q.10 Will any Canadian officials be assisting the U.S. in their investigation?

A.10 Minister Speller has offered Canada's assistance to U.S. Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman. Our officials are working closely with their U.S. counterparts, sharing the expertise that Canada has gained from our own similar experience. CFIA officials are participating in the investigation in Washington State.

Officials on both sides of the border are currently collecting samples for DNA testing. Results from these tests in a few days are expected to provide further information on the tracing efforts under way as part of the investigation.

Q.11 Will there be a recall of beef products in Canada?

A.11 To date, our investigation has shown that no affected product has entered into the commercial market in Canada. Therefore, there are no plans to recall any product in Canada at this time. The U.S. has decided to recall beef linked to the infected cow as a cautionary measure. The likelihood that this beef could contain the infectious agent is considered to be extremely low. Should any specific risk be identified, we will take any necessary action to prevent potentially harmful products from entering the food chain.

Q.12 How do you think other countries will react to the suggestion that the BSE-infected cow originated in Canada?

A.12 We would hope that our trading partners will take a responsible position and base their actions and decisions on scientific evidence, and on the general principles agreed to by the Office International des Epizooties (OIE). At this point, it is premature for anyone to conclude where the infected cow originated.

Q.13 Is there any link between this case and the case detected in Alberta earlier this year?

A.13 There is no evidence at this time to suggest that the two cases are linked either by cattle movements or by a common source of feed. Both of these elements continue to be investigated.

Q.14 What action is Canada taking to investigate the possibility that the infected animal may have originated from Alberta?

A.14 To determine the status of all animals that would have been part of an Alberta herd in 2001, the CFIA is reviewing records and interviewing the farm owner and the agent who handled the dispersal sale of the herd at the time.

Based on registration information, the sire (father) of the animal in question has been determined. This provides the opportunity to conduct DNA comparison.

It is known that the animal in question had two calves born in Canada prior to being exported to the U.S. Her first calf died on pasture shortly after birth. The status of the second calf is part of the tracing confirmation effort. If it is determined that she remains alive, she would also provide potential for DNA comparison with the brain of the positive cow.

A parallel feed investigation is also underway.

Q.15 Given the detection of this animal, are there any plans to harmonize Canadian and American BSE policies?

A.15 The common exposure and risk factors associated with the importation of live cattle from the United Kingdom in the 1980s and the historic integration of trade in animals and feeds in North America have led Canada and the U.S. to adopt extensive complementary and parallel measures over the past 14 years to reduce the risk and possible spread of BSE.

Canada remains committed to working in close collaboration with the U.S. to protect public and animal health in any policy adjustments that might be considered.

Q.16 What could be responsible for the apparent discrepancies between the ear tag information held by Canadian and American officials?

A.16 In the early stages of information gathering for an investigation of this type, a combination of reviewing available documentation and interviewing people involved is utilized. It is therefore important that all available information be cross-referenced, validated and further verified by current scientific methods.

Q.17 Has the source of the feed been found in Canada?

A.17 *The source of the feed ban has not been determined. We are conducting a comprehensive and rigorous investigation which includes collecting, cross-referencing and validating information at all levels. This includes the farm, the retail and distribution level, the formulation and production level as well as the source of the raw materials.*

It is far too early and inappropriate to speculate or draw conclusions on the information gathered to date.

Q.18 How does Canada treat downer animals intended for slaughter?

A.18 *All downer animals presented for slaughter are inspected by a veterinarian before and after being slaughtered. Any animals, including downers, exhibiting any symptoms compatible with BSE are removed from the food system and tested for BSE. As well, a sample of downer animals determined by inspection to be safe for human consumption are tested for BSE and held pending negative test results.*

Q.19 Why doesn't Canada test all downer animals for BSE?

A.19 *The primary purpose of Canada's surveillance program, which includes testing and holding suspect animals at slaughter, is to determine the prevalence of the disease. The removal of SRM is a much more effective public health safeguard than testing alone since the removal of SRM prevents any tissues capable of harboring the BSE agent from entering the food system.*

Downers include all animals with injuries or impairments that prevent them from being able to stand or move. An animal may be considered a downer if it has a broken leg or other conditions that would not necessarily affect food safety. For that reason, banning all downer animals could be viewed as an unwarranted economic loss to many Canadian farmers.

Not all downer animals are true BSE suspects. The ante mortem and post mortem examinations carried out by qualified veterinarians, are an important component in determining the status of animals at slaughter.

The critical measure to protecting public health and food safety is the removal of specified risk materials to prevent any tissue capable of harboring the BSE agent from entering the food system. Because the tests used to detect BSE are not proven to be able to detect the disease in its early stages, the removal of SRM is a much more effective public health safeguard.

Q.20 *What is Canada's policy on Advanced Meat Recovery?*

A.20 *Canada changed its regulations on Advanced Meat Recovery (AMR) in July of 2003 to include a definition of "specified risk materials" and to ensure that SRM is removed at slaughter before AMR occurs. Furthermore, the skull, brain, trigeminal ganglia, eyes, tonsils, spinal cord and dorsal root ganglia of cattle aged 30 months or more are all considered inedible, and cannot be used for AMR.*

Q.21 *What is Canada's policy regarding air injection stunning of cattle?*

A.21 *The use of forced air injection stunning of cattle has been prohibited in Canada since May of 2000.*