



Fact Sheet

ENHANCEMENTS TO BSE SURVEILLANCE AND ANIMAL TRACKING

The Government of Canada has announced enhancements to two of Canada's BSE measures - disease surveillance and animal tracking.

The enhancements to existing measures build upon Canada's internationally respected suite of BSE safeguards, which has been augmented regularly since measures to mitigate BSE risk were first introduced in 1989. Enhancements to disease surveillance and animal tracking are important investments in the health of Canadian cattle, strengthening the ability of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) to monitor and track the national herd.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) is continuing the pattern of intensifying its BSE surveillance activities on an annual basis. Disease surveillance, which involves the testing of animals for BSE, has been in place in Canada since 1992. Starting immediately, the number of animals tested annually will be progressively increased to a level capable of detecting BSE at a prevalence as low as one-in-one-million animals.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency will aim to test a minimum of 8,000 animals over the next 12 months, and then continue to progressively increase the level. The ultimate number of animals tested will reflect international standards, which are expected to be revised over the next one to two years. Testing will focus on the those animals most at risk of BSE. These include animals demonstrating clinical signs consistent with BSE, so called "downer" animals—those unable to stand, as well as animals that have died on farm, are diseased or must be destroyed because of serious illness. A sample of healthy older animals will also be tested. Provinces will play a significant role in the surveillance effort.

Canadian Food Inspection Agency Laboratories are adding the Prionics® Check-Western rapid test as a routine screening tool to further support the national BSE surveillance program. The Prionics® Check-Western was the rapid test used during the 2003 BSE investigation. The CFIA's Science Branch is continuing to evaluate a number of other commercial BSE rapid test kits for use in federal and provincial veterinary diagnostic laboratories participating in the TSE Veterinary Diagnostic Network.

Since its inception, the surveillance program has been expanded and enhanced to reflect changes in international standards, enhanced understanding of BSE and technological advances. Prior to the detection of BSE in Canada in May, 2003, the primary purpose of the program was to determine if the disease was present in Canada. With BSE detected in North America, the focus of surveillance is now to determine the prevalence of the disease and to gauge the effectiveness of Canada's BSE risk management measures. Surveillance is not a food safety protection measure. The removal of specified risk materials from animals at slaughter prevents all potentially infectious material from entering the food system.

Enhancements are also being introduced to strengthen Canada's cattle identification program, as recommended by the international team of animal and human health experts that reviewed Canada's investigation. The identification program provided invaluable information about the BSE-infected cow's background during the investigation last May. Enforcement of the program will be increased, as will research into new technologies. Linkages and integration with provinces, territories, industry and trading partners will also be enhanced.

These enhancements will be implemented by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. Health Canada is also enhancing its capacity to identify and trace the presence of bovine-derived material in the products it regulates.

The Government has worked in close consultation with provincial, territorial, industry and U.S. representatives during the development of these measures. This collaboration will continue to ensure effective and efficient implementation and, where appropriate, alignment with U.S. measures.

For more information:

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