

Will Beef from Canadian Cattle Younger Than 30 Months of Age Impact Consumer Confidence in U.S. Beef?

R-CALF USA (February 15, 2005)

- The World Organization for Animal Health (Office International des Epizooties or OIE) recognizes a risk of BSE in cattle less than 30 months of age.
 - OIE health standards recommend the removal of specified risk materials (SRMs) from cattle at different ages, depending on the BSE incidence rate and the length of time risk mitigation measures were *effectively* enforced.
 - OIE health standards recommend that for BSE-affected countries (even where the BSE incidence rate is less than one case per million head of cattle, but where a country has not effectively enforced its meat-and-bone meal (MBM) feed ban for at least 8 years) that all SRMs be removed from cattle over 12 months of age.
 - For countries with a high BSE risk, the OIE recognizes a BSE risk in even younger cattle, and recommends the complete deboning of cattle over 9 months of age.
 - Although it is uncertain if Canada's incidence rate of BSE is more than one case per million head of cattle, it *is* known that Canada has not had its MBM feed ban in place for 8 years. Therefore, OIE standards recognize a BSE risk from Canadian cattle at least 12 months of age.
- Every other BSE-affected country in the world recognizes a risk of BSE in cattle less than 30 months of age. This is evidenced by the fact that each of these countries, whether they have had only one documented case of BSE (Israel) or numerous cases of BSE (European Union), all remove SRMs from all cattle over at least 12 months of age. (The possible exception is Lichtenstein, for which information is unavailable.)
- USDA, in its negotiations with Japan, stated it does not know the BSE risk to human health associated with central nervous system (CNS) tissues from cattle that carry the BSE disease, but are too young for BSE to be detected using the current limited testing methods. This admission strongly suggests that any exposure to beef from younger cattle originating in a country where BSE is known to exist, such as Canada, presents an *unknown BSE risk to consumers*.
- Recent scientific evidence reveals that the agent that causes BSE – prions (a unique, newly-discovered disease-causing protein) have been found in many tissues of laboratory animals, sheep, and humans where it was never before found, including blood, and muscle, including tongue. This cutting-edge scientific evidence suggests a greater probability than previously assumed of BSE risk in many more tissues other than SRMs currently recognized by the OIE.
- Countries more experienced than Canada in managing and reducing BSE risks have already detected BSE in many cows as young as 20 months of age, proving that 30 months of age does not and will not exclude all BSE cases. BSE can and has been diagnosed in cattle between the ages of 20 to 30 months of age.
- Canada is the only BSE country in the world that does not require country-of-labeling on meat cuts at the retail level. Likewise, the U.S. doesn't require it either. As a result, U.S. consumers will not be able to distinguish between beef produced from U.S. cattle and beef produced from Canadian cattle younger than 30 months of age. (The possible exception is Lichtenstein, for which information is unavailable.)

Because Canadian cattle will not comply with recommendations by the OIE or the current risk mitigation practices of all other BSE-affected countries; and based on USDA's own admissions, the latest, cutting edge, scientific evidence, and actual detections of BSE in cattle between 20 to 30 months of age; and finally because U.S. consumers will not be afforded country-of-origin information, beef from Canadian cattle younger than 30 months of age will likely impact consumer confidence in U.S. beef.