



June 30, 2005

SAFE FOOD SUPPLY

America has one of the safest, if not THE safest, food supply in the world, which starts at the farm level and is monitored by our State and Federal government. Countries that refuse our meat products really need to study the situation more carefully. Take for instance the first mad cow disease, formally known as Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), case known as identified within the United States which did NOT enter the food chain. The detail of the information that we know, even without mandatory animal ID, is incredible.

Last week, USDA Chief Veterinarian John Clifford announced details on the epidemiological investigation into the recently confirmed BSE case. DNA test results have confirmed that USDA has identified the source herd of the animal, determined last week to be positive for BSE. Based on information officials received from the owner, the cow was born and raised in a herd in Texas and was approximately 12 years old. It was sent to a 3D/4D pet food plant in Texas and was selected for sampling on arrival.

The source herd is now under a hold order as USDA officials identify animals of interest within the herd. Consistent with guidelines, animals of interest would include any other animals that were born the same year as this animal, as well as any born the year before and the year after. If the age of the animal cannot be pinpointed, officials will then expand their inquiry to include all animals in this herd before the feed ban went into place in 1997. Officials are also interested in any of the animal's offspring that were born within the last two years.

Experience worldwide has shown us that it is highly unusual to find BSE in more than one animal in a herd, or in an affected animal's offspring. Nevertheless, all animals of interest will be tested for BSE. USDA officials are also working with the Food and Drug Administration in an effort to determine the feed history in this herd. Given the animal's age, they believe it was most likely infected by consuming feed prior to the implementation of the ruminant-to-ruminant feed ban in 1997.

It is very important to emphasize that this animal did not enter the human food chain. The plant at which this animal was sampled is a 3D/4D pet food plant that does not handle animals for human consumption and, in this case, did not use the animal in the production of pet food. The animal remains were incinerated.

The testing and traceback efforts may yield further information as to how this animal became infected. USDA Veterinarian John Clifford says the safety of our food supply is not in question. He is very confident that our interlocking safeguards are effective, and this case is evidence of that. USDA bans nonambulatory cattle (downer cattle) from the food supply. USDA bans animal parts that could carry BSE from the food supply. USDA bans slaughter techniques that could introduce BSE into the food supply.

Importers need to take note. These safeguards ensure that our American beef is among the safest in the world.



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