

**CANADIAN BSE POLICY AND RELATED INFORMATION**

Statement by Canada at the Meeting of 14-15 March 2001

1. We have this item on today's agenda to take an early opportunity in this Committee to outline our policy on BSE, and to inform Members of the recent actions we have taken regarding the application of this policy.
2. Countries world-wide have recognized BSE as a global concern. Indeed the FAO indicated recently that there is a significant potential that BSE has moved beyond the borders of Europe, clearly signalling that we all need to be vigilant in taking appropriate action to limit its spread.
3. Canada has adopted effective and appropriate policies based on sound scientific rationale to mitigate the risks of BSE contamination. These include: the creation of a surveillance programme; only allowing the importation of live animals and their meat and meat products from countries assessed to be free of BSE; banning feeding of rendered protein products from ruminant to ruminants; making BSE a reportable disease in Canada; and creating a Canadian cattle identification programme to be able to trace animals from the herd of origin to slaughter.
4. It is also important to recognize that simply because a country has not had a case of BSE does not accurately reflect the risk of importing meat or meat products from that country for several reasons.
5. For example, we need to see effective import controls, documentation and surveillance systems and effective segregation of rendered animal protein. These are some factors which can indicate that the risk of BSE is mitigated. This is especially true when we consider the long period of time between when an animal becomes infected with BSE and when it becomes ill. A report of BSE in a country may still occur after new controls have been put in place. Also the disease may not be accurately reported in all countries, thus making it difficult to assess the risk of importing products from those countries.
6. Therefore when we assess the risk in relation to another country, we need documented assurances, often involving on-site visits, that a country has BSE controls in place. Regulatory authorities in NAFTA countries have agreed to collaborate in conducting BSE risk assessments. Under this agreement, Mexico is responsible for central American countries, United States for European countries and Canada is responsible for all other regions of the world.
7. These policies are always applied in a non-discriminatory manner and Canada is continually assessing international scientific information as it becomes available and modifying policies as required, based on new information.
8. With respect to recent Canadian actions against Brazil, most Members will be aware of the situation generally and many may have heard several versions of the facts. I would like to provide to

this Committee the outline of events and the rationale for actions which Canada has taken consistent with its rights and obligations under the SPS Agreement.

9. On 2 February of this year, Canada suspended imports of food products from Brazil covered by our policy for BSE. The products affected were valued at approximately \$ 8 million Cdn and consisted almost entirely of canned corned beef with a lesser amount of bulk beef extract.

10. Under Canada's BSE policy, we do not accept imports of relevant products from a given country unless we have recognized that country to be free of BSE, based on a scientific risk assessment.

11. Canada submitted formal notification of our BSE policy to the WTO on 16 April 1998 (G/SPS/N/CAN/39) and we implemented the policy on 15 June 1998. This policy took into account the comments we received from Members on our proposed policy which we had notified more than a year earlier, on 9 January 1997 (G/SPS/N/CAN/18).

12. Upon adoption of our BSE policy in 1998, we requested all countries exporting these products to Canada to provide us with the information necessary to permit us to conduct a risk assessment.

13. In this connection, Brazil was formally notified of Canada's new BSE policy, in a letter dated 28 May 1998 and provided a questionnaire for risk assessment purposes.

14. The information we request for a risk assessment is based on the multilateral criteria established by the International Office of Epizootics, the body whose competence in this field is specifically recognized by the SPS Agreement.

15. As of January 2001, Brazil was the only country that had not complied with our request for information. Argentina, Uruguay, the United States, Australia and New Zealand had all provided the information that allowed the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to conduct a proper assessment which, in their case, resulted in recognition as BSE free.

16. On 25 January 2001, the Food and Agriculture Organization reported on the significant potential that BSE may have already moved beyond the borders of Europe.

17. On 30 January 2001, there were public reports from Brazil which were confirmed by Brazilian veterinary authorities that they had initiated an audit of imports of live animals from BSE-infected countries. Brazilian authorities confirmed that such imports into Brazil from Europe had continued until 1999. Indeed, Brazilian authorities discovered and indicated to us that approximately 6000 head of cattle had been imported from both BSE affected and BSE high-risk countries. This information was not consistent with Canada's previous understanding from Brazil that they had ceased such importations in 1990.

18. These two factors were critical elements in Canada's decision for taking action at that time for health and safety reasons, pending the provision of full information from Brazil and the completion of a risk assessment.

19. Veterinary authorities sought to provide information in reaction to being informed of the suspension. However, Members will appreciate that it takes time to assess information about a complex subject like the system of controls necessary to ensure that BSE risk materials were not being exported to Canada. Canadian authorities could not leave Canadians unprotected in the face of an identified potential risk for the period of time a risk assessment would require.

20. Canada took the decision under its statutory obligation to protect the health of Canadians to suspend imports and issue a recall of products already in Canada.

21. On 23 February, Canada lifted its suspension after the receipt and analysis of extensive documentation and data from Brazil, followed by an on-site validation visit by scientists from Canada, United States and Mexico.

22. Canadian regulatory officials and their US and Mexican counterparts were satisfied that Brazil has taken sound measures to prevent BSE.

23. However, there are three conditions that imports of Brazilian beef products must meet to enter Canada, the US or Mexico. Brazilian authorities have indicated that they are willing to satisfy these conditions for certification.

- First, shipments must be certified as containing beef products from cattle that were born and raised in Brazil, and not from any imported sources of beef.
- Second, the beef must come from cattle born after Brazil enacted its 1996 ruminant-to-ruminant feed ban.
- Third, shipments must be accompanied by a statement certifying that the cattle used in the products were exclusively grass-fed, and not fed any animal proteins.

24. Brazilian officials have also enacted legislation requiring that all cattle imported from countries with BSE will be traced, tested at the end of their productive life and destroyed through incineration or deep burial on their premises.

25. The action taken by the CFIA on 2 February was a prudent and reasonable measure, and was supported by the Canadian Health Department.

26. This action was taken to protect consumers and safeguard Canada's food supply. This was, and remains, our most important priority.

27. With the suspension lifted, and Canada confident that Brazil is in compliance with Canadian BSE policy, Canada has resumed importing Brazilian beef products subject to the three aforementioned conditions. Canada also received a response from Brazilian authorities on 6 March attesting that the recalled product also satisfied the three conditions and on 9 March, Canada released all recalled product.

28. Further details about the measures taken by Canada are available through the web site of the CFIA ([www.cfia-acia.gc.ca](http://www.cfia-acia.gc.ca)) or from the Canadian mission.

29. I want to conclude with a few points to anticipate questions which may be on the minds of some Members.

30. Some may be wondering if Canada over-reacted in suspending imports from Brazil on 2 February and could have taken less trade-restrictive action.

31. Canada did not over-react. The absence of risk assessment information from Brazil for nearly three years and the important information about imports to Brazil of live animals from BSE-infected countries which came to light on 30 January, required quick yet prudent action to protect the health of Canadians.

32. The information that Brazil continued to import livestock from BSE affected countries up to 1999 and were just now initiating efforts to trace these clearly amounted to a real risk.

33. We also acted responsibly to ensure that any disruption to trade was minimized.

34. In this connection, we made it clear from the outset that we would complete our risk assessment as a priority. We delivered on this. The risk assessment was completed by veterinary officials from Canada, Mexico and the United States in approximately 3 weeks, which included an on-site visit to Brazil by a large team of technical officials. We would also compliment Brazil on their efforts to facilitate our on-site inspection in such an expeditious manner.

35. Some Members may also wonder why Canada did not notify its measure with respect to Brazil. The answer to this is that we notified our policy in draft and in final and that our recent action does not constitute a new measure or modification of an existing measure, but simply a decision under the policy we notified in 1998.

36. As a last and additional point of information to Members regarding our BSE policy, I would like to recall Canada's notification of 7 December 2000 (G/SPS/CAN/94) advising of additional BSE measures to further mitigate the risk arising from incomplete or ineffective segregation of ruminant derived protein during the rendering or animal feed production which could result in cross-contamination.

37. Further to the notification in December, Canada's chief veterinary officer has recently written to those Members which were affected, based on import history.

38. The letter invites these Members to submit information to provide assurances that, for certain non-ruminant products, cross contamination is not possible based on their individual production circumstances. Canada is prepared to extend this approach to any Member interested in shipping such rendered animal products.

39. If anything, these recent BSE-related measures demonstrate that Canada continues to be vigilant with respect to BSE and that, when cause for concern arises, our health authorities act decisively to protect the health of our public which is their number one priority. As you can see, such decisions are taken in a reasonable manner, appropriate for the perceived risk, and with assurances that follow on activities are conducted promptly to minimize any disruption to trade.

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