
Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures

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**JOINT WHO/FAO/OIE TECHNICAL CONSULTATION ON BSE:
PUBLIC HEALTH, ANIMAL HEALTH AND TRADE**

Meeting held at OIE Headquarters in Paris on 11-14 June 2001

PRESS RELEASE

Paris, 14 June – Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) and variant Creutzfeld-Jakob Disease (vCJD) should be considered as an international issue as potentially infected BSE materials have been distributed throughout the world through trade of live cattle, certain cattle products and by-products. All countries are urged to evaluate their potential exposure and should take necessary actions, according to the recommendations of the four-day technical consultation which ended today.

The meeting was jointly organized by the World Health Organization (WHO), the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Animal Health Organization (OIE). The conference was a major step towards strengthening their efforts and speak with one voice about the risks associated with BSE and vCJD.

More than 150 veterinarians, food safety experts and health officials called upon governments to consider the ban the feeding of meat and bone meal (MBM) to ruminants and to put in place surveillance and testing.

The consultation adopted the following main recommendations:

- The original source and movement of animals and animal products, including MBM, can be masked by international trading patterns which often include the processing and re-export of products. Consequently, importing countries should be aware of risks generated by these existing trading patterns and illegal trade.
- Countries should not become complacent about their risk from BSE. The extremely low initial incidence and limited clustering of BSE cases, protracted latency and non-specific nature of the early clinical signs of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy tend to mask the severity of the problem.
- All countries are urged to evaluate their potential exposure through systematic assessment of trade data and possible risk factors. In addition, countries should be aware that their trading status may be dependent upon the risk assessment for BSE.
- Additional resources should be made available to assist nations particularly in the developing world in assessing their potential exposure to BSE-infected materials and in identifying measures which may be necessary for managing the risk associated with this exposure.

- The OIE has developed guidelines for assessing the BSE risk status of regions, countries and zones. More specific guidance for conducting these risk assessments in particular for human health, taking advantage of the experience of countries and other international organizations are required.
- Protection of public health is the overarching goal of BSE risk management. Risk management strategies must be science-based, transparent and not more trade restrictive than necessary for health protection. Implementation of the chosen risk management options must be strictly enforced to protect global health and trade. Efforts by authorities must be directed at ensuring full compliance.
- Ruminant MBM and greaves should not be fed in any case to ruminant animals. Monitoring of compliance with the feed bans needs further development of reliable certification programmes and screening tests to guarantee the absence of BSE infectivity in ruminant feedstuffs traded internationally. Emphasis must be placed on the development of rapid and reliable tests for the detection of ruminant protein.
- Countries should strongly consider, on the basis of the risk assessment, the use of appropriate tests on target animal populations.
- The consultation considered that BSE contaminated MBM will have been fed to some sheep and goats in certain countries and that these species may have been infected with BSE agent. It is therefore recommended that individual countries assess the risk that BSE infection is present in their indigenous sheep/goat population. All countries are encouraged to require notification and surveillance for TSE diseases of sheep/goats and to take steps to mitigate risks identified.
- In countries where sheep and goat populations have been potentially exposed to BSE infectivity, measures should be taken to minimize the exposure of humans to infectivity from sheep and goats.
- Efforts to investigate the presence of natural BSE in sheep and goats should be continued.
- The research available to date indicates that oral BSE challenge of pigs and poultry does not result in disease and that there is no evidence for residual infectivity present in tissues.
- Scientists should continue to be proactive, take the initiative to communicate new information about BSE and its risks, as it becomes available, even though it may be unsettling to the public. They should make clear what is being done to address these risks.

Journalists who would like more information about the issues discussed are welcome to contact:

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