

**DEVELOPMENTS IN CANADA REGARDING BOVINE SPONGIFORM
ENCEPHALOPATHY (BSE)**

Statement by Canada at the meeting held on 29-30 October 2003

1. At the last meeting of this Committee in June 2003, Canada's Ambassador Marchi provided information regarding the reporting of BSE this past May in Canada.

2. I would like to take this opportunity to provide Members with a brief update since that time on BSE-related developments in Canada, as well as internationally.

Investigation of the Canadian Case

3. At the last meeting, the Canadian delegation outlined the findings of our own investigation as well as the conclusions of the International Team of BSE Experts that we asked to review these findings. All of this information continues to be made available, with updates as appropriate, on the Canadian Food Inspection Agency website at www.inspection.gc.ca

4. Since the last meeting of this Committee, Canadian authorities have used DNA analysis and other investigative techniques to definitively identify the herd of origin and date of birth of the case animal. It has now been confirmed that the animal with BSE was born in the province of Saskatchewan, Canada, in March 1997, prior to the coming into force of Canada's feed ban.

5. With this information, Canadian authorities can now also confirm that they have removed all the appropriate animals prescribed by the OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code. All of these animals have been destroyed.

6. The most likely source of infection was contaminated feed to which the case animal was exposed early in its life. The probable source of contamination would have been associated with a very small number of animals imported from the United Kingdom between 1982 and 1989 which may have introduced infectivity into the animal feed chain after they were slaughtered.

7. Canada is able to confirm this limited exposure to BSE on the basis of measures taken in 1993 when the 122 remaining animals of a total of 191 imported from the United Kingdom were destroyed and tested negative. Of the 68 animals that had been slaughtered or died prior to the 1993 depopulation, only 10 trace their origins to United Kingdom farms which subsequently had a case of BSE.

8. We have endeavored to be totally transparent throughout this process and will continue to do so in the future. We have asked our Embassies around the world to provide all information, as it becomes available, to the host governments.

Canada's Regulatory Response to BSE

9. In addition to acknowledging the effectiveness of Canada's pre-existing BSE risk management measures, the International Team of BSE Experts made certain recommendations concerning possible enhancements to measures for food, animal feed, surveillance and animal identification.

10. Canada has responded quickly to the first of the International Team's recommendations. Specifically, on 24 July, Canada began requiring the removal of Specified Risk Material (SRM) at slaughter in all jurisdictions in Canada and to prohibit their use in food for human consumption.

11. These requirements took effect immediately in Federally Registered establishments which are the only Canadian meat processing establishments eligible to export from Canada.

12. Canada is evaluating further science-based regulatory policy changes and their practical implementation in order to complete Canada's response to the International Team's recommendations.

13. For example, Canada is 1) reviewing its feed ban introduced six years ago with a view to reinforcing it, 2) developing targeted increases in surveillance to provide additional evidence regarding the effectiveness of our measures, as well as 3) strengthening existing animal tracking systems.

14. Once these domestic regulatory policy decisions have been finalized, Canada will conduct a review of its BSE-related import policies and, as necessary, its export certification practices.

Prevalence of BSE in Canada

15. It is important to note that recent and proposed regulatory enhancements build on the strong animal health and food safety measures previously implemented by Canada relevant to the mitigation of BSE risks over many years.

16. Although BSE has recently been detected in an indigenous cow, Canada's stringent approach to BSE over the last fourteen years and the results of the BSE surveillance program to date provide compelling evidence that the incidence of BSE in Canada is that of a minimal risk country as defined in the OIE's Terrestrial Animal Health Code.

17. The basis for this conclusion has been carefully considered and documented by Canadian scientists in a paper available from Canadian authorities or on the Canadian Food Inspection Agency website in English, French and Spanish, at www.inspection.gc.ca.

18. Accordingly, the appropriate sanitary measures allowing for the import of Canadian animals and products of animal origin are those contained in the OIE Code either as unrestricted, such as semen, embryos, milk and milk products and protein-free tallow, or as prescribed in the Code for live animals, meat and meat products

Trade-Related Issues

19. Canada would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge those countries which have implemented measures to allow either the continuation, or reinstatement, of market access for certain products exported from Canada.

20. This is an encouraging first step. We applaud these actions and encourage other Members to open their borders to products which we know scientifically can continue to be safely traded.
21. We are asking our trading partners to base their measures on science and on OIE standards, consistent with their obligations under the SPS Agreement.
22. Canada would like to remind countries of the OIE recommendations regarding certain products, as previously mentioned, that should clearly be exempt from any BSE-related measures, regardless of a country's BSE status; that is to say, semen, embryos, milk and milk products, and protein-free tallow.
23. There is no recognized scientific basis for banning the entry of these products and we request all countries with bans in place on such products to immediately review these measures with a view to bringing them into conformity with their obligations.
24. Of more significance, using OIE standards as a basis, we would request the establishment of conditions that would allow for the trade in other safe products, such as numerous meat and meat products, including lamb, goat, caribou and muskox.
25. We also believe that it is possible, using the OIE standards as a basis, to agree on conditions that would allow for the trade in certain categories of pet food and live animals.

OIE-Related Issues

26. Canada has experienced first-hand the enormous social, political and economic impact that the discovery of BSE poses for countries which have made appropriate investments in disease surveillance, detection and reporting.
27. The reality is that there are very few countries in the world that fully adopt or embrace the recommendations from the OIE, as regards imports from BSE-affected countries, Canada included. While the SPS Agreement provides for such actions, some countries have even done so without the benefit of a risk assessment, as called for under Article 3.3 of this Agreement.
28. As such, the current global consequences for a country that discovers a case of BSE does not encourage non-BSE countries to increase active surveillance. In Canada's case, the reporting of one case of BSE (within the context of overall BSE risk management measures that compare favorably, internationally) has had a marked negative impact on the Canadian economy.
29. While Canada will continue to make the necessary investments and to be transparent with the international community, we are concerned that such consequences undermine the fulfilment of the OIE's mission to protect the safety of world trade and promote the transparency of animal disease status world-wide.
30. The international community needs science-based international rules and standards that will not only ensure the safety of products traded, but also ones that importing countries will fully implement, commensurate with the risks.
31. It is in this context that Canada's Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, jointly with his counterparts from Mexico and the United States, wrote to the OIE to identify areas of concern and opportunities for improvement under the OIE system.

32. Canada is encouraged by the support and responsiveness of the OIE. During the week of 22-26 September 2003, the OIE's Ad Hoc Group to Review the BSE Chapter and the Ad Hoc Group for Evaluation of Country Status for BSE met in Paris. We understand that these Groups continued their work plan as mandated by the International Committee to further review the BSE Chapter based on new scientific information and to consider the means to simplify the categorization of country status. Canada looks forward to commenting on proposals stemming from these meetings and to their adoption next spring at the OIE's General Session.

Conclusion

33. Canada's investigation was thorough, transparent and conclusive.

34. Objective analysis undertaken by our authorities, in cooperation with experts from other countries, clearly demonstrates that Canada is a minimal risk country.

35. Already safe Canadian beef has been made safer with the requirement to remove Specified Risk Materials at slaughter.

36. Finally, Canada looks forward to working cooperatively with other WTO Members to resume access for exports of Canadian products, under safe and practical conditions, and in the further evolution of science-based and consistently implemented OIE standards.
