

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

Statement by Canada at the Meeting of 1-2 February 2006

The following communication, received on 1 February 2006, is being circulated at the request of the Delegation of Canada.

1. Canada is pleased to report on two developments relating to BSE in Canada. First, as you will recall, at the June 2005 SPS Committee meeting, Canada advised that it had notified its draft BSE Import Policy for Bovine Animals and their Products (G/SPS/N/CAN/244). Following a 60-day comment period ending on 22 July 2005, Canada undertook an analysis of the comments received, both from WTO Members and domestic stakeholders. On 9 December 2005, the policy was finalized and adopted by Canada. This was notified to WTO Members on 15 December 2005 by an addendum to the earlier notification (G/SPS/N/CAN/244/Add.1).

2. The new import policy is based largely on the guidelines and text adopted by the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) for BSE in May 2005, and reflects current scientific understanding of the measures necessary to protect human and animal health. Canada undertook to review and update its BSE import policy following a similar review by the OIE of its standards, recognizing that the international scientific understanding of BSE and the available measures to mitigate its transmission have evolved substantially in recent years. In light of revisions made to the international standards, our previous policy was determined to be more restrictive than the current international standards which provide the scientific basis to protect human and animal health while permitting safe trade.

3. One example of how our BSE import policy has adopted a less restrictive approach is the inclusion of commodities eligible for safe trade whether or not a country has confirmed cases of BSE. Consistent with the new OIE guidelines, boneless meat from animals less than 30 months of age is now included in the list of commodities that are eligible for safe trade whether or not a country has confirmed cases of BSE. Moreover, under our import policy, science-based standards have been elaborated for safe trade in other commodities including bone-in meat, meat from animals over 30 months of age and live animals with additional certification guarantees, in recognition of the effectiveness of control measures in place without necessarily having to conduct a risk assessment.

4. This policy will maintain Canada's appropriate level of protection but in a less trade restrictive manner. This policy provides a framework to assess the BSE-risk status of a country and a range of applicable measures to ensure that the likelihood of importing the BSE-agent leading to the exposure of humans and animals is negligible. The conditions are specific for BSE in bovine animals only.

5. It is important to note that, before a particular commodity can be imported, other relevant conditions must still be met, for example, the evaluation and approval of the meat inspection system of a country, specific measures for other animal diseases of concern, and the hygienic removal of specified risk materials.

6. In addition to finalizing and adopting a revised import policy, on 23 January 2006, Canada released its epidemiological report, entitled "Canada's Assessment of the North American BSE Cases Diagnosed from 2003-2005 (Part II)" (<http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/anima/heasan/disemala/bseesb/eval2005/evale.shtml>). This report is subsequent to a report issued in July 2003 following the finding of the first indigenous Canadian case of BSE in May 2003. The January 2006 report provides an updated examination of the current BSE situation in Canada based on the understanding of the disease to date.

7. BSE is thought to have entered North America during the 1980s when a limited number of cattle were imported from the United Kingdom. Given the incubation period of BSE, some of these cattle could have been infected with BSE despite appearing healthy and having been certified to have originated from farms in the United Kingdom where BSE had not been detected.

8. This report identifies the common elements of the cases in North America that support the current hypothesis as to why most of the diagnoses have occurred in cattle born within a specific geographic area in Western Canada, why the animals have been born within specific time periods and what this information indicates about the level of BSE remaining in North America.

9. The report supports the conclusion that the level of BSE in Canada is exceedingly low and declining in response to remedial measures that have been applied by Canada.

10. In light of our epidemiological findings, and the new science-based standards adopted by the OIE, we call upon our trading partners to base their measures on the OIE standards, as we have done with the adoption of a revised BSE import policy.

11. With the global identification of BSE continuing to decline to slightly more than 410 animals in 2005, down from 878 in 2004 and 1,389 in 2003, and with the spectre of other emerging zoonotic diseases of global concern, it is more important than ever that Members base their import decision-making on science based standards for safe trade in order that we create an environment that encourages appropriate surveillance, reporting and mitigation investments to protect animal and human health.

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