

Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures

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**INTERNATIONAL STANDARD ON BOVINE SPONGIFORM
ENCEPHALOPATHY (BSE)**

Submission by the Office International des Epizooties (OIE)

1. Given the recent press attention focusing on the problem of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) and the growing number of notifications to the WTO on this subject, in application of the provisions of the SPS Agreement, the OIE would like to remind WTO Members of the existence of the international standard on this disease constituted by a chapter in the OIE *International Animal Health Code (the Code)* (chapter 2.3.13). The most recent version of the *Code* dates back to May 2000 and the text of this chapter may be consulted in its entirety on the web site of the OIE (www.oie.int).

2. No new scientific information has emerged to throw doubt on the validity of this standard. Moreover, this standard has been regularly updated by the OIE since 1992, notably through a careful reading of the relevant scientific publications and consultation of the best world experts in the field of transmissible spongiform encephalopathies in animals.

3. Chapter 2.3.13 of the *Code* indicates in particular that the status of a country with regard to BSE may only be determined after having conducted a risk assessment covering all of the potential factors affecting the occurrence and spread of the disease, as well as their evolution over time.

4. As an example, the factors listed in article 2.3.13.1 include:

- the inclusion of meat-and-bone meal of ruminant origin in the rations distributed to cattle;
- the importation of such potentially contaminated products;
- the importation of cattle or cattle embryos from countries infected by the disease or likely to be so;
- the epidemiological situation concerning transmissible spongiform encephalopathies in animals in the countries being assessed;
- the origin of animal waste and the parameters selected for the treatment to which it is subjected;
- the obligation to declare any suspicion of BSE in the country being assessed;
- the implementation of a programme to raise the awareness of professionals in the cattle production chain and an adequate surveillance system;
- the existence of approved laboratories with personnel trained in the diagnosis of the disease.

5. In the light of the available scientific knowledge, the OIE recommends that, whatever the health status of an exporting country with regard to BSE, importing countries should not apply any restrictions on importation or transit through their territory:

- of milk and milk products;
- of semen;

- of protein-free tallow and derivative products;
- of dicalcium phosphate (with no trace of protein or fat);
- of hides and skins;
- of gelatine and collagen prepared from hides and skins.

6. The OIE has drawn up special recommendations concerning the importation of cattle, embryos, fresh meat and meat products depending on the health status of the exporting country with regard to BSE. Chapter 2.3.13 also provides recommendations for international trade in gelatine and collagen prepared from bones and tallow (other than protein-free) that are intended for human consumption or animal feedstuffs, cosmetics or pharmaceutical products, or medical devices.

7. Two elements have recently resulted in an advance in the field of BSE surveillance: firstly, rapid post-mortem diagnostic tests have been developed on an industrial scale, and secondly, certain countries have drawn attention to the fact that it is advisable to monitor not only clinically suspect animals, but also dead or injured animals on the farm. This has resulted in an increase in the number of cases identified in certain countries, which in practice allows these countries to apply control measures in herds with a resulting fall in the risks associated with BSE.

8. Furthermore, the general prohibition on feeding all animals, including pigs and poultry, with meat-and-bone meal of ruminant origin does not result from the discovery of a new BSE risk in pigs and poultry, but from an effective risk management mechanism adopted by several countries. The manufacturing and distribution conditions for feedstuffs destined for pigs, poultry and fish in infected countries has led to accidental cross-contamination of rations destined for cattle from meat meal in the factory, during transport, or on the farm.

9. The International Animal Health Commission will put forward proposals to the International Committee (General Assembly of delegates from the 155 OIE Member Countries) in May 2001 with a view to further improving the guidelines on BSE surveillance, and will not fail to report to this Committee on the question of meat-and-bone meal.
