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Regulatory Analysis and Development  
PPD, APHIS, Station 3A- 03.8  
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**RE: Docket No. APHIS 2006-0041; Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy; Minimal-Risk Regions; Importation of Live Bovines and Products Derived from Bovines Commodities**

On behalf of Farm Sanctuary, the nation's largest non-profit organization dedicated to the protection of farmed animals, I wish to comment on the proposed regulations regarding the importation of animals and animal products to the United States from regions described as "minimal risk" regarding bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE).

APHIS is proposing to allow the importation of:

- 1) Live cattle and other bovines
- 2) Blood and blood products derived from bovines
- 3) Casings and part of the small intestine derived from bovines
- 4) Meat and meat products from animals of any age, with specified risk materials removed

We do not agree with this proposal and do not believe these products should be imported to the U.S. due to the risk of BSE.

According to Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns, "This proposal would continue to protect against BSE in the United States while taking the next step forward in our efforts to implement science-based trade relations with countries that have appropriate safeguards in place to prevent BSE." Ensuring positive trade relations with other countries is important, but not enough to put the American food supply at risk.

## **Imports from Canada**

This new proposal by APHIS will expand the list of allowable imports from countries recognized as presenting a *minimal risk* of introducing bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) into the United States. Currently, Canada is the only minimal-risk country designated by the U.S.

Canada has found nine cases of mad cow disease in the last four years and they only test around one percent of their cattle. A more robust testing program would likely find more cases of the disease. (Consumer Reports, 2007) In addition, one of the animals confirmed to have mad cow disease in the United States was a cow who was actually imported from Canada. Canadian beef has been banned by Japan, South Korea, Australia and – until recently – the U.S. (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2006)

## **Specified Risk Materials**

The importation of cattle intestines poses significant risk to consumers, especially since intestines are known to be high-risk material. Specified Risk Materials (SRM) should be excluded from both human and animal foods and should certainly not be imported from countries with a history of problems with BSE, such as Canada. These materials include the brain and spinal cord, skull and vertebral column *and intestines from all cattle*.

A total ban on SRM, would best protect the public. The intestine should be considered a primary source of infectivity since infection with BSE has come from cattle ingesting contaminated feed, according to the Scientific Steering Committee of the European Union. In classifying the entire intestine as SRM, the EU Steering Committee noted that because slaughterhouse contamination of other intestinal areas with matter from the ileum can't be avoided, it is prudent to remove the entire small and large intestine.

## **Blood and Blood Products**

The importation of cattle blood and blood products also poses an unacceptable risk to animals and consumers. We should not allow cattle blood and intestines to be imported for use as animal feed. The European Union has banned all animal protein except milk and eggs from use in feed for any animal that enters the human food chain (Bonné, 2004) and the U.S. should do the same. There is evidence that Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy (TSE) diseases, of which BSE is one, are capable of crossing the species barrier. Some scientists theorize Britain's BSE outbreak occurred when cows ate feed containing parts of sheep and goats infected with scrapie (another TSE).

We oppose the current practice of feeding cows' blood to calves. Cow's blood collected at U.S. slaughterhouses is used to supplement the colostrum replacer given to young calves. Dairy producers use milk replacer made from cattle blood protein as a cheaper alternative to milk. Cattle blood may also be sprayed directly on the feed of weaned calves and young pigs.

A number of published studies have shown prion transmission through blood (Vojvodic S, 2002; U.S. Food and Drug Administration, 2002; BBC News, 2005) and the European Commission report on the assessment of BSE risk in the U.S. has specifically condemned the practice of intraspecies recycling of ruminant blood and blood products.

### **BSE Testing**

The USDA should require mandatory testing of *all* cattle imported to the U.S. from countries with mad cow disease, such as Canada. Consuming meat products contaminated with BSE has been linked to more than 150 human deaths worldwide from variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (Associated Press, 2006). Japan's national policy is for every cow to be tested for BSE (Lempert, 2006). The U.S. should do the same to protect the health and well-being of animals and people. Currently, the USDA tests less than one percent of the cattle population and is in the process of initiating a reduction in BSE surveillance. Instead of reducing surveillance, Farm Sanctuary urges the USDA to *increase* the number of BSE tests conducted nationwide and require mandatory testing of all imported cattle.

### **Non-Ambulatory (Downed) Cattle**

It is generally agreed that non-ambulatory cattle are more likely to be infected with BSE than healthy cattle and therefore pose a greater risk to public health. In fact, all three cows found to have BSE in the U.S. (Washington - 2003, Texas - 2005, Alabama - 2006) were “downed” (i.e. unable to stand and walk).

Therefore, Farm Sanctuary *strongly supports* the USDA’s ban on the slaughter of downed cattle, and urges that this ban be made permanent and expanded to include all livestock species. Meat and animal by-products from countries without a strictly enforced ban on the slaughter of downed cattle should not be imported to the U.S.

The Harvard-Tuskegee Study has suggested that the risk of BSE transmission could be further reduced by prohibiting the rendering of animals who die on the farm, an approach we support. Most provinces in Canada allow on-farm slaughter as a way of dealing with downed animals. It is legal in many provinces for these animals to enter the food supply. In addition, it is legal for downed animals to be processed at slaughterhouses and enter the Canadian food supply. (Canadian Food Inspection Agency, 2007)

In regard to standards, we request that the following concerns be taken into consideration and addressed by any surveillance program of live non-ambulatory animals:

- 1) It is important that examination of live animals be conducted in a timely manner so that animal suffering is minimized.
- 2) Animals must be humanely euthanized in a timely manner by properly trained personnel and only by approved methods.

Please do not weaken the safeguards that protect American citizens from BSE. The USDA may hope that the risk of BSE infectivity is minimal and the disease will not spread in the United States, however hope is not enough. We depend on the government to provide safe food for American citizens – and in order to provide this safe food, the government must not weaken existing policies regarding BSE. In fact, these should be strengthened.

Thank you for considering Farm Sanctuary's comments on this important issue.

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