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BSE

This information is regarding the recent confirmation of BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) in an animal in the state of Washington. There has never been a connection between BSE and dairy products, however, concern about the human health risk is understandable. It may help to discuss the precautions taken by the meat industry in the United States to prevent the spread of BSE in their industry.

Specifically, the processing of meat requires the removal and disposal of all animal tissue which may have any risk of exposure to BSE. The USDA has repeatedly stated that the meat supply in the United States is safe, even after discovery of BSE in one animal. The animal health and food safety networks in place in the United States provides for the identification of all dairy cattle, allowing for a tracing back to its birth herd and tracing forward to the disposition of its meat products. A series of safeguards to restrict the spread of BSE in the United States have been in place since 1989.

The USDA has banned the importation of ruminant products from BSE infected countries since 1989. Because of concerns of widespread risk factors and inadequate surveillance for BSE, in 1997 this ban was extended to all European countries. In 2000, USDA prohibited the importation of all rendered animal protein products from Europe because of risk of cross-contamination with BSE agents. The importation of live ruminants and ruminant products from Canada was banned in May 2003. The USDA took the additional step on December 30, 2003 of banning from the human food chain meat products from downer animals. Surveillance for BSE in California has been constant.

Since 2000, increased surveillance by CDFA's Animal Health Branch, targeting downer cattle, has been in place. Random testing of downer cattle at slaughter has been part of the increased surveillance effort.

Compliance with feed bans has been excellent in California.

Concerning the safety of milk, the scientific data indicate that milk from BSE cows does not transmit BSE. National and international public health organizations have consistently stated that milk and milk products are safe regardless of whether the country producing them has had cases of BSE.