

BSE Overview

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), or “Mad Cow Disease” as it is more commonly called, is a fatal and transmissible animal disease that affects the central nervous system of adult cattle. The first diagnosis of BSE was made in Great Britain in 1986. Cattle became infected after eating feed that contained a particular protein. The disease is most likely spread by feeding rendered parts of cattle infected with BSE to other cattle in the form of meat and bone meal.

In 1997, the U. S. Food and Drug Administration prohibited the use of feed containing the proteins that cause BSE. On December 23, 2003, Secretary of Agriculture, Ann M. Veneman announced that there was a “presumptive positive” case for BSE in the United States. The next day, the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) initiated a Class II recall of 10,410 pounds of meat from the group of 20 animals slaughtered at the plant that day. Testing continued in the United Kingdom, where it was confirmed positive on December 25, 2003.

On December 30, Secretary Veneman announced a number of safeguards to protect the public health and enhance protection against BSE, including the immediate banning of non-ambulatory disabled cattle from the human food supply.

On January 8, the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced three rules and a Notice. The rules went into effect on January 12. The ban on slaughter of non-ambulatory disabled cattle took effect upon the Secretary’s announcement.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy Surveillance Program

This notice announced that FSIS inspectors will no longer mark cattle tested for BSE as “inspected and passed” until confirmation is received by both FSIS and the plant that the cattle have, in fact, tested negative for BSE.

Prohibition of the Use of Specified Risk Materials for Human Food

This interim final rule declares that skull, brain, trigeminal ganglia, eyes, vertebral column, spinal cord and dorsal root ganglia of cattle 30 months of age or older and the small intestine and tonsils of all cattle are specified risk materials and cannot be used in human food. Tonsils from all cattle were already prohibited. In this rule, FSIS is requiring federally inspected establishments that slaughter cattle to remove, segregate and dispose of these specified risk materials so that they cannot possibly enter the food chain. To facilitate the enforcement of this rule, FSIS has developed procedures for verifying

the approximate age of cattle that are slaughtered in official establishments. State inspected plants must have equivalent procedures in place to prevent these specified risk materials from entering the food supply.

Meat Produced by Advanced Meat/Bone Separation Machinery and Meat Recovery (AMR) Systems

AMR is a technology that removes muscle tissue from the bone of beef carcasses under high pressure without incorporating bone material. AMR product can be labeled as “meat.” FSIS has previously established and enforced regulations that prohibit spinal cord from being included in products labeled as “meat.” This interim final rule prohibits dorsal root ganglia, clusters of nerve cells connected to the spinal cord along the vertebral column, in addition to spinal cord tissue. In addition, because the vertebral column and skull in cattle 30 months and older will be considered inedible, they cannot be used for AMR.

Prohibition of the Use of Certain Stunning Devices Used to Immobilize Cattle During Slaughter

To ensure that portions of the brain are not dislocated into the tissues of the carcass as a consequence of humanely stunning cattle during the slaughter process, this interim final rule bans the practice of air-injection stunning.