



## USDA'S BSE TESTING PROGRAM

### APHIS' Enhanced Surveillance Program for Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has undertaken an intensive animal health surveillance program for BSE. The program is designed as a one-time effort that will provide a snapshot of the domestic cattle population to help define whether BSE is present in the United States, and if so, help calculate at what level.

Experience in the Europe since the first BSE diagnosis has shown that testing high-risk cattle is the method most likely to identify BSE if it is present. APHIS' increased surveillance of the U.S. cattle population is designed to test as many cattle from the high-risk population as possible in a 12- to 18-month period. The program is tailored to collect the majority of samples from the following categories:

- Nonambulatory cattle;
- Cattle exhibiting signs of a central nervous system disorder, such as staggering, excess nervousness, or apprehension;
- Cattle exhibiting other signs that may be associated with BSE, such as emaciation or injury; or,
- Dead cattle.

In order to reach as many high-risk cattle as possible, samples will be taken from the farm, slaughter facilities, ren-

dering facilities, livestock auctions, veterinary clinics, and public health laboratories. The surveillance program will also include a limited number of random samples from apparently normal, aged animals. The sampling of apparently normal animals will come from the 40 U.S. slaughter plants that handle 86 percent of the aged cattle processed for human consumption each year in the United States. The carcasses from these animals will be held and not allowed to enter the human food chain until test results show the samples are negative for BSE.

Under the enhanced surveillance program, sampling 201,000 animals would allow APHIS to detect BSE at the rate of 1 positive in 10 million adult cattle at a 95-percent confidence level assuming that all of the positives are in the targeted high-risk population. If 268,500 animals were sampled, APHIS could detect BSE at the same rate at a 99-percent confidence level. In other words, the enhanced program could detect BSE even if there were only five positive animals in the targeted population in the entire country.

BSE surveillance samples will be tested at APHIS' National Veterinary Services Laboratories (NVSL) and at other network laboratories. Rapid-screen testing

will be performed, and any suspect samples will undergo confirmatory testing by other methods such as immunohistochemistry and/or Western blot.

If additional cases of BSE are identified in the United States, the cattle owners would be compensated for any cattle taken as a result of the traceback/trace-forward investigations. Based on what we know about transmission of BSE, APHIS would not be depopulating an entire herd. APHIS will only be looking for individual animals that may have been exposed at a young age to the same feed as the affected animal. Any quarantine of affected animals would be temporary and losses due to the investigation would be reimbursed.

USDA and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) have strong safeguards in place to prevent the spread of BSE in the United States. Since 1989, USDA has banned the importation of live ruminants and most ruminant products from the United Kingdom and other countries having BSE. HHS prohibited the use of most mammalian protein in the manufacture of animal feed intended for cows and other ruminants.

Several safeguards are also in place to protect public health. Most importantly, USDA has taken action to ensure that



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the tissues associated with BSE from animals considered most likely to have the disease have been banned from the human food chain. USDA has also made sweeping changes in slaughter and processing establishments that further reduce any risk to public health.

## **BSE SURVEILLANCE PROGRAM OUTREACH**

As part of the enhanced surveillance program, APHIS is reaching out to cattle producers, renderers, slaughter facility operators and others to encourage their participation. The goal of the enhanced surveillance program is to provide consumers, trading partners, and industry increased assurances about the safety of the U.S. cattle population.

To reach this goal, it is essential that animals identified as high-risk cattle are reported in a timely fashion so that viable samples can be collected.

To report high-risk animals, as described above, call APHIS' toll-free number **1-866-536-7593**. You will be connected to the Area Veterinarian-in-Charge and given instructions on how to proceed.

More information on the BSE surveillance program is available online at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/lpa/issues/bse/bse.html>

General information about BSE is available online at [http://www.aphis.usda.gov/lpa/issues/bse/bse\\_geninfo.html](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/lpa/issues/bse/bse_geninfo.html)

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