

## APHIS' BSE Surveillance Program

### **Q. What is the new surveillance program for bovine spongiform encephalopathy?**

**A.** The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has implemented an intensive national surveillance program for bovine spongiform encephalopathy (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.

The goal of the program is to test as many cattle from the high-risk population as possible in a 12–18 month period. In order to reach as many high-risk cattle as possible, samples will be taken from the farm, slaughter facilities, rendering facilities, livestock auctions, veterinary clinics, and public health laboratories.

The surveillance program will also randomly sample 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.

### **Q. Why did APHIS implement this enhanced surveillance program?**

**A.** After the diagnosis of a case of BSE in an imported animal, USDA adopted several new public health safeguards to bolster U.S. protections and encourage trading partners to recognize the minimal BSE risk presented by U.S. beef. The goal of the enhanced surveillance program is to provide consumers, trading partners, and industry increased assurances about animal health, specifically whether BSE exists in the U.S. cattle population and if so, at what level.

### **Q. How will the testing be conducted?**

**A.** USDA personnel will collect samples from high-risk cattle and send the samples to an existing network of state and federal laboratories approved to conduct rapid-testing for BSE. If the sample is negative, no further testing will be conducted. If the sample is inconclusive, confirmatory testing will be conducted at APHIS' National Veterinary Service Laboratories (NVSL), the national BSE reference laboratory.

### **Q. What is an inconclusive result?**

**A.** Inconclusive results are test results for which a negative result cannot be determined using a single test assay. Such results are not unexpected and are a normal component of most screening tests. These tests are designed to be extremely sensitive so as to detect any sample that could possibly be positive. An inconclusive sample would undergo confirmatory testing using immunohistochemistry (IHC), which is recognized internationally as the gold-standard for BSE testing, or other confirmatory tests.

### **Q. What if additional cases of BSE are identified?**

**A.** There is a possibility that the enhanced surveillance program will identify additional cases of BSE. If 268,500 animals are sampled, APHIS could detect BSE at a rate of 1 in 10 million adult cattle at a 99 percent confidence level assuming that all of the positives are in the targeted high-risk population. In other words, the enhanced program could detect BSE even if there were only five positive animals the targeted population in the entire country.

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 trace-back/traceforward investigations. Based on what we know about transmission of BSE, APHIS would not be depopulating an entire herd. APHIS will be looking for individual animals that may have been exposed at a young age to the same feed as an 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 import 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 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.

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**Q. What can APHIS' partners do to help?**

**A.** APHIS will build upon established partnerships with State animal health officials and many different segments of industry to obtain as many samples as possible from the targeted high-risk cattle population. Samples will be collected from any of the following locations:

- State or Federally inspected slaughter establishments
- Custom-exempt slaughter establishments
- Farms
- Rendering facilities
- Veterinary diagnostic laboratories
- Animal feed slaughter facilities (pet food plants)
- Public health laboratories
- Veterinary clinics

APHIS needs cooperation from its many partners in this intensive surveillance program. To reach our 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, 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.

**Q. What are high-risk animals?**

**A.** Experience in Europe has shown that testing high-risk cattle is the method most likely to identify BSE if it is present. Therefore, USDA has tailored its surveillance program 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; and
- Dead cattle.

USDA personnel will also sample all cattle condemned on ante-mortem inspection by USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service.

**Q. Where can individuals get more information?**

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

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