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CANADIAN MEAT COUNCIL
CONSEIL DES VIANDES DU CANADA

FSIS Docket Clerk,
Docket 03-025IF,
Room 102, Cotton Annex,
300 12th Street, SW.,
Washington, DC 20250-3700

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**Subject: Docket No. 03-025IF - Additional comments on the Proposed Rule
“Prohibition of the Use of Specified Risk Materials for Human Food and
Requirements for the Disposition of Non-Ambulatory Disabled Cattle”.**

SUMMARY: The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) is amending the Federal meat inspection regulations to designate the brain, skull, eyes, trigeminal ganglia, spinal cord, vertebral column (excluding the vertebrae of the tail, the transverse processes of the thoracic and lumbar vertebrae, and the wings of the sacrum), and dorsal root ganglia (DRG) of cattle 30 months of age and older, and the tonsils and distal ileum of the small intestine of all cattle, as “specified risk materials” (SRMs). The Agency is declaring that SRMs are inedible and prohibiting their use for human food. In addition, FSIS is requiring that all non-ambulatory disabled cattle presented for slaughter be condemned. The Agency is requiring that federally-inspected establishments that slaughter cattle and federally-inspected establishments that process the carcasses or parts of cattle develop, implement, and maintain written procedures for the removal, segregation, and disposition of SRMs. Establishments must incorporate these procedures into their HACCP plans or in their Sanitation SOPs or other prerequisite program. FSIS is taking this action in response to the diagnosis on December 23, 2003, by the U.S. Department of Agriculture of a positive case of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) in an adult Holstein cow in the State of Washington. This action will minimize human exposure to materials that scientific studies have demonstrated as containing the BSE agent in cattle infected with the disease. Infectivity has never been demonstrated in the muscle tissue of cattle experimentally or naturally infected with BSE at any stage of the disease.

On April 7, 2004, FSIS published a notice (Docket No. 03-025N/01-003P) in the Federal Register announcing the availability of, and requesting public comment on, its preliminary regulatory impact analysis of the three interim rules and the notice. FSIS also extended the comment period for the three interim rules issued on January 12, 2004 to May 7, 2004.

The Canadian Meat Council appreciates the opportunity to provide further comments on the Proposed Rule “Prohibition of the Use of Specified Risk Materials for Human Food and Requirements for the Disposition of Non-Ambulatory Disabled Cattle”, that was published in the Federal Register: January 12, 2004 (Volume 69, Number 7)].

MS Beef

In Canada, the current practice is to remove the spinal cord from cattle of all ages and to send this spinal cord to inedible rendering. The Canadian Meat Council does not support the banning of Mechanically Separated Beef (MS Beef) for animals less than 30 months of age. Rather we support the banning of the use of spinal column in the production of MS Beef from animals 30 months of age and older. This would ensure that no tissues of concern such as spinal cord and dorsal root ganglia would be incorporated into the final product. The banning of the use of spinal column from MS Beef from animals 30 months of age and older would also remove the requirement for testing of Central Nervous tissue in MS Beef since there would be none present. In Canada, skulls from any food animal species (including poultry) are prohibited to be used as a source material in meat recovery systems that use pressure to separate muscle tissue from the bones, regardless of the fact that the brains (and trigeminal ganglia) may have been removed from the skull.

We also support the use of Advanced Meat Recovery systems with Advanced Meat/Bone Separation Machinery for recovering meat from long bones that do not contain Central Nervous System tissue.

Specified Risk Materials (SRM)

The Canadian Meat Council supports the removal of the tonsils under Specified Risk Materials from cattle of all ages.

We believe that the distal ileum should be classified as Specified Risk Material. However, the regulatory requirements in place in the United States requiring the removal of the entire small intestine to ensure removal of the distal ileum is unwarranted are not based on science. The distal ileum is only a small portion of the small intestine and can be scientifically defined and removed. The remaining portion of the small intestine is a highly useful and valuable product that is safe.

Hand deboned meat

The Agency is requesting comments on the safety of hand deboned meat from the vertebral column of cattle 30 months of age and older for use as human food. We believe that as long as standard boning procedures are followed that the meat will be safe for human consumption.

Verification of Age of Cattle

The Agency is aware of two methods that can be used to verify the age of cattle slaughtered in official establishments: (1) Documentation that identifies the age of the animal, such as a birth certificate, cattle passport, or some other form of identification, that is presented with the animal when it arrives for slaughter, and (2) examination of the dentition of the animal to determine whether at least one of the second set of permanent incisors has erupted (the permanent incisors of cattle erupt from 24 through 30 months of age). The Agency has decided to use a combination of both methods.

The Canadian Meat Council supports both methods of age verification of cattle. We also believe that as long as other methods of age verification of cattle can be verified - such as birth certificates - that dental examination of the animal should not be necessary.

Non-Ambulatory Disabled Animals

The Canadian Meat Council supports the ante-mortem inspection of cattle as soon as they arrive at the slaughterhouse. If the animal passes that inspection it should not be subject to another inspection, as an example should it fall and fail to get up in the chute.

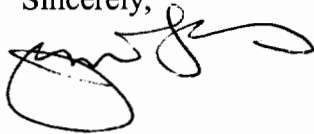
We also support the interpretation of the rules that should a veal calf be down upon arrival at the slaughterhouse that it be allowed to rest prior to ante-mortem inspection. It may simply be tired from transportation.

Dedicated Equipment and Saws

We urge the USDA to eliminate its requirement that beef imported from Canada must be processed using dedicated equipment when removing specified risk materials (SRM) from cattle over 30 months of age versus those under 30 months of age. The USDA imposed the dedicated equipment requirement on Canadian processors in August of 2003 in order for Canada to resume exports to the USA of boneless beef. This requirement of dedicated equipment is not one that the USDA requires of US plants slaughtering animals for US consumption and therefore that rule should not be imposed on Canada.

We appreciate the opportunity to submit our comments on this proposed rule.

Sincerely,



James Laws
Executive Director