



THE SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE
WASHINGTON, D.C.
20250-0100

March 29, 2004

His Excellency
Yoshiyuki Kamei
Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
Tokyo, Japan

Dear Minister Kamei:

Greetings from Washington where the cherry blossoms are resplendent this week – thanks to a gift from your government nearly one hundred years ago.

I am writing today to present a proposal to your government that we believe has the potential to enable us to end the impasse over BSE trade restrictions and return to more normal trading patterns.

We are now at a critical juncture internationally with the BSE issue. Our knowledge and understanding of the disease have increased tremendously in recent times and important precedents need to be established, especially regarding international commerce in beef and beef products. And, much of the world is looking to our two governments to provide the leadership and establish the example of how this issue should be appropriately handled in the future.

My government is proposing that the United States and Japan jointly approach the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) and request expedited technical consultations. We have been in contact with OIE officials and have assurances that they are prepared to respond favorably to such a request. The following steps outline that process and suggest the specific topics that could be addressed.

- Both countries agree upon well-defined questions to pose to a panel of OIE experts by April 9.
- Both countries would agree upon a common list of candidates that would form the consultation panel along with OIE experts by April 14. (The OIE would provide us names of international experts from which we would jointly agree upon a list from which the panel would be selected, subject to their availability in the designated time period.)

- The panel would meet before April 26 in a mutually agreeable location (the OIE would prefer Paris, but another location such as Tokyo or Washington would be acceptable). The panel would meet initially in conjunction with technical experts from Japan and the United States who would provide information as requested.
- The panel could provide responses to the agreed-upon questions by April 30.
- The responses then would form the basis for subsequent actions by our governments that would enable the resumption of trade as appropriate. The responses also would be released to the public and posted on the OIE website.

Our experts would work together to most appropriately frame the issues to present to the OIE experts. At the end of the consultation process, we should be in a position to agree on a definition of BSE and related testing methodologies as well as a common definition of specified risk materials (SRMs). Our agreement on these items should improve public confidence in our food safety systems and provide a basis for the resumption of trade.

Specifically, we would suggest the following questions be posed to the OIE experts:

- What is the appropriate laboratory definition of a BSE case? Clarification is needed on the relative importance of screening and confirmatory tests for reporting a BSE case.
- What are the appropriate SRMs in accordance with the risk levels in our countries?
- Having answers to the first two questions, what conditions must the United States and Japan implement in order to re-establish trade in meat and meat products through mutually recognized conditions associated with our countries' BSE risk?

I appreciate your consideration of this proposal and I look forward to discussing it with you at your first convenient opportunity.

Sincerely,



Ann M. Veneman