

USDA Office of Inspector General Statement on Audit Work Related to the BSE Test Result Announced on June 10, 2005

In August 2004, the Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Office of Inspector General (OIG) issued an audit report on USDA's *BSE Surveillance Program—Phase I*. (See OIG's website at: <http://www.usda.gov/oig/webdocs/50601-9-final.pdf>.) OIG made a number of recommendations to improve the Department's BSE Surveillance Plan in the *Phase I* audit report. Based on our audit findings, we recommended that USDA fully disclose the assumptions behind its sampling plan, clarify the limitations, and ensure that all high-risk animals are sampled and tested in accordance with USDA policy and the 2004 Surveillance Plan. We also recommended that USDA expedite development of a new system to track and report accomplishments, and implement performance measures and a continuous risk assessment.

Currently, OIG has two audits in progress pertaining to BSE. In our *BSE Surveillance Program—Phase II* audit, OIG is monitoring the Department's implementation of its BSE Expanded Surveillance Program, involving both APHIS and FSIS. This audit will evaluate the following: the effectiveness of USDA's expanded BSE Surveillance program; the performance of BSE laboratories in meeting their objectives and complying with program policies and procedures for conducting tests on submitted BSE samples and reporting test results to APHIS and stakeholders; and the corrective actions taken by USDA in response to recommendations in the *BSE Surveillance Program—Phase I* audit report cited above.

In our *Phase III* audit, we are evaluating whether the USDA enforcement of the ban on specified risk materials (SRMs) in meat products and controls to prevent central nervous system (CNS) tissue in advanced meat recovery (AMR) product have been effectively implemented. The review also covers FSIS ante mortem condemnation procedures and procedures for obtaining brain tissue samples from condemned cattle for BSE testing.

In the course of reviewing voluminous records and information gathered during the *BSE Surveillance Program—Phase II* audit, OIG auditors noted an unusual pattern of conflicting test results on one sample and initiated additional testing of that sample. As announced by USDA on June 10, the sample subsequently rendered a positive result under the OIE (World Organization for Animal Health) recognized SAF immunoblot test.

Once the audits are completed, OIG will issue a single report on the specific BSE-related issues and procedures described above, our corresponding findings and recommendations, and USDA's response thereto. Our estimated date for completing and publicly releasing the report is January 2006.