

USDA HARMONIZES CATTLE TRADE WITH CANADA IN LINE WITH INTERNATIONAL ANIMAL HEALTH STANDARDS

WASHINGTON, Sept. 14, 2007—The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) today announced that it will expand the list of allowable imports from countries recognized as presenting a minimal risk of introducing bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) into the United States. Currently, Canada is the only minimal-risk country designated by the United States.

"This rule is firmly based in science and ensures that we continue to protect the U.S. against BSE," said Bruce Knight, under secretary for marketing and regulatory programs. "It also is consistent with our commitment to promote fair trade practices and further normalizes trade with countries that institute the appropriate safeguards to prevent the spread of BSE."

This rule makes final a proposed rule published in the Jan. 9, 2007 *Federal Register*.

It also builds upon and expands the rule published by APHIS in January 2005 that allowed the importation of certain live ruminants and ruminant products, including cattle under 30 months of age for slaughter from countries recognized as minimal risk. The final rule announced today allows for the importation from Canada of:

Live cattle and other bovines (i.e., bison) for any use (including breeding) born on or after, March 1, 1999, which APHIS has determined to be the date of effective enforcement of Canada's ruminant-to-ruminant feed ban;

Blood and blood products derived from bovines, collected under certain conditions; and

Casings and part of the small intestine derived from bovines.

The January 2005 final rule, the first MRR rule, allowed the importation of Canadian bovine meat and meat products of any age. Subsequent to the publication of the final rule in January 2005, USDA delayed the applicability of those provisions of that final rule that dealt with meat and meat products from animals 30 months of age or older. With this final rule published today, that temporary delay in applicability is lifted and importation of these meat and meat products now can occur.

As part of its BSE rulemaking process, APHIS conducted a thorough risk assessment following guidelines put forth by the World Organization for Animal Health, or OIE, that evaluated the entire risk pathway, including mitigations in place both in Canada and the United States. The assessment also included evaluating the likelihood of BSE introduction via imports, the likelihood of animal exposure in the U.S. if this were to occur and the subsequent consequences. The assessment found that the risk of BSE establishment in the United States as a result of the imports announced today and those announced in January 2005 is negligible. APHIS considered new information related to the risk assessment, including Canada's identification of animals born after the date of the feed ban to evaluate the potential impact and determined that the original assessment was sufficiently robust that new data did not change the conclusions of the assessment. The risk assessment underwent a thorough, independent peer review in which all of the reviewers concurred with APHIS' risk assessment. The reviewers agreed that APHIS followed OIE guidelines and standards and acknowledged the scientific rigor of the assessment.

Additionally, APHIS encouraged the public to participate in the decision-making process by providing feedback through the submission of public comments. The public comment period on the proposed rule opened Jan. 9, 2007 and closed on March 12, 2007.

There are a series of interlocking safeguards in place to protect animal health from BSE transmission. These longstanding safeguards include the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's ruminant-to-ruminant feed ban, import controls, aggressive disease surveillance and U.S. slaughter practices.

Moreover, human health in the United States also is protected by another system of interlocking safeguards that ensure the safety of U.S. beef. The most important of these safeguards is the ban on specified risk materials from the food supply. Canada has similar safeguards in place.

The final rule is scheduled for publication in the Sept. 18, 2007 *Federal Register* and becomes effective Nov. 19, 2007. Additional information is available at www.aphis.usda.gov.