



State of Utah

Department of  
Agriculture and Food

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# News

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## UTAH BEEF SUPPLY SAFE FROM BSE (mad cow disease)

“Utahns can be assured that our food safety system is working, and that bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), or Mad Cow disease is not present in Utah.” Those are the comments from Utah Commissioner of Agriculture and Food, Cary G. Peterson following a USDA briefing regarding the discovery of one dairy cow infected with BSE in Washington State.

“The risk to human health is extremely low, considering that no specific risk material such as head, brain or spinal cord tissue from the Washington cow made it into the food system,” said State Veterinarian, Dr. Michael R. Marshall. Raw meat product from the cow was processed December 9, 2003, and distributed in a limited area in Washington, Oregon and possibly California. That product has been identified and is under a USDA class II recall, which involves products not considered a threat to human health. For information on BSE and how it relates to human health visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention web site: [www.cdc.gov/travel/diseases/madcow.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/travel/diseases/madcow.htm)

As of today, the Washington State cow has not been officially confirmed as being infected with BSE. Final tests on the suspect tissue are underway at the World Reference Laboratory in England. Test results are expected within seven days. The case remains a presumed positive for BSE nonetheless.

The herd from which the infected cow originated is under quarantine and will undergo tests, as will any cow that came in contact with the infected animal.

The USDA has initiated a comprehensive epidemiological investigation working with state, public health, and industry counterparts to determine the source of the disease. USDA will also work with the Food and Drug Administration as they conduct animal feed investigations, the primary pathway for the spread of BSE.

“Despite this finding, we remain confident in the safety of our beef supply,” said U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, Ann M. Veneman . “The risk to human health from BSE is extremely low.”

Because the animal was non-ambulatory (downer) at slaughter, samples were taken Dec. 9 as part of USDA’s targeted BSE surveillance system. The samples were sent to USDA’s National Veterinary Services Laboratory in Ames, Iowa. Positive results were obtained by both histology (a visual examination of brain tissue via microscope) and immunohistochemistry (the gold standard for BSE testing that detects prions through a staining technique). Test results were returned on Dec. 22 and retested on Dec 23.

(more)

Utah Department of Agriculture and Food livestock veterinarians inspect each and every cow that is processed for consumer consumption in Utah. Veterinarians have been on the look out, for some time, for a number of livestock diseases including BSE and foot and mouth disease.

BSE is a progressive neurological disease among cattle that is always fatal. It belongs to a family of diseases known as transmissible spongiform encephalopathies. Also included in that family of illnesses is the human disease, variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (vCJD), which is believed to be caused by eating neural tissue, such as brain and spinal cord, from BSE-affected cattle. USDA has determined that the cow comes from a farm in Washington State and as part of the USDA response plan, the farm has been quarantined. After the animal was slaughtered, the meat was sent for processing and USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service is working to determine the final disposition of products from the animal.

For more information visit <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/lpa/issues/bse/bse.html>.

For information from the beef industry visit: <http://www.bseinfo.org/pr1.htm>

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