

Canadian Press  
May 23, 2003

# **British expert urges recall of animal food made from infected cow**

By JUDY MONCHUK

CALGARY (CP) - A British expert on mad cow disease says Canada should ban cattle remains from being processed into animal feed of any kind to avoid possible contamination.

Malcolm Ferguson-Smith also said all feed made from the carcass of the diseased Alberta animal should be immediately recalled. "Now you know you have rendered infected material . . . in one rendering plant and presumably passed on to feed mills," he said. "Withdraw anything that was supplied by the rendering firm that supplied the feed mills," said Ferguson-Smith.

"That was not done in the United Kingdom in the initial stage of the epidemic, and everybody regrets the fact that no attempt was made to call back the feeds that had already been sold to farmers that could have been contaminated," said the genetics professor from Cambridge University.

He was part of an inquiry that examined the spread of mad cow disease in the United Kingdom in the mid-1980s and 1990s.

The British inquiry's final report noted that "a cow can become infected with BSE as a result of eating an amount of infectious tissue as small as a peppercorn."

An estimated 44,000 British cattle were infected with BSE because their feed had been contaminated by food destined for pigs and poultry, he said. In 1996, the United Kingdom banned all animal protein from all animal feed.

In 1997, Canada changed its feed regulations to ban the feeding of ruminant meat and bone meal to other ruminants such as cattle and sheep. It is still allowed to go to other animals such as chickens and pigs.

But Ferguson-Smith warned all animal feed derived from cattle should be pulled and farmers compensated.

Food inspectors have quarantined farms in three provinces - Alberta, British Columbia and Saskatchewan - as they try to determine how the cow became infected with bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE).

Investigators are also focusing on feed mills and rendering plants that might have provided contaminated feed up to six years ago.

The three B.C. farms are believed to have received animal feed produced by a rendering plant that processed the remains of the diseased Alberta cow. The other 10 quarantined herds are those in which the Alberta cow or her offspring may have spent time.

A top official with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency said all regulations involving animal feed and processing are being examined because of the mad cow crisis.

But chief veterinarian Dr. Brian Evans added that repeated studies of Canada's rendering system have shown it to be safe - beyond even recommendations by the World Health Organization.

"Experts from Europe, from the United States and from New Zealand have come and assessed Canada previously and found that our measures were where they should be and even went beyond what they would have thought existed," Evans said in Ottawa.

Ferguson-Smith said Canada should also ban the use of cattle offals: brain, spinal cord, nervous system, lymph nodes and the gut. Those parts may contain the infected BSE agent even before the animal shows signs of the disease.

"That shouldn't go into food destined for animals. What is permitted to go into food for animals in Canada are bits of the animal: blood, milk, animal fat which can still get into cattle feed. These are not believed to be highly infective parts of the animal, but you still can't exclude that they carry the agent."

Ferguson-Smith said there is a misunderstanding that diseases in the family to which mad cow belongs don't jump species through contaminated pet food.

"Of course it jumps species. It jumps an enormous number of species," he said.

"A large number of cats in the United Kingdom were infected with BSE because of contaminated cat food, so it's a misunderstanding to believe it doesn't cross over into other species."