



# What is our meat supply eating?

**Source:** CBC THE NATIONAL  
**Date:** Monday, January 19, 2004  
**Time:** 22:00 EST  
**Length:** 1140 words



*Rendered animal parts used  
in cattle feed*

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**PETER MANSBRIDGE (HOST):**

We're going to take a short break right now, then we'll return with this story.

**BRUCE BAMFORD (ALBERTA RANCHER):**

Cattle eat plants. That's what cattle are, they're herbivores.

**PETER MANSBRIDGE (HOST):**

Well, not quite. You'd be surprised at what we eat is eating and some believe it's a practice that should be stopped.

**JOHN STAUBER (AMERICAN AUTHOR ON B.S.E.):**

We're completely out of step.

**PETER MANSBRIDGE (HOST):**

A second course of "What we Eat."

**PETER MANSBRIDGE (HOST):**

Over these past few weeks, we have invited your questions about what we eat. The idea for this next story from a viewer in Quebec. Lorraine Taylor is worried about mad cow disease, and she wanted to know what our meat supply is eating. We asked "The National's" Heather Hiscox to investigate, to look at what's being fed to Canadian cattle and why.

**HEATHER HISCOX (REPORTER):**

Cattle spend their day in near constant mandibular motion, grabbing, grinding, gulping down some 50 kilograms of feed every day. Their diet is as carefully balanced and monitored as a high performance athlete's.

**DAVID LOWETH (DAIRY FARMER):**

It certainly is economically driven.

**HEATHER HISCOX (REPORTER):**

David Loweth runs one of Ontario's largest dairy farms. On his and most cattle operations, the bucolic image of old Bessy munching in a pasture is a distant memory.

**DAVID LOWETH (DAIRY FARMER):**

From 4 to 5,000 litres, we're now looking at cows that average 13 to 15,000 litres per cow per year.

**HEATHER HISCOX (REPORTER):**

The cow's size hasn't changed. What has is the business of farming, the pressure to produce more milk or more meat faster and cheaper, so food costs for the consumer stay low and profits for the producer as high as possible.

**DAVID LOWETH (DAIRY FARMER):**

As long as the cow remains healthy, and that's certainly our number one priority, the health of the cow and the longevity of the cow, then we do try things to push for higher production.

**HEATHER HISCOX (REPORTER):**

One of the things farmers do is add concentrated supplements to cattle feed. The bulk of a cow's diet, 60%, is hay and grass, alfalfa, and corn silage. Forages, they're called. Grains make up about 20%, high-energy corn, barley, sometimes bakery products like cereal and cookies. 10% is vitamins and minerals, and the final 10% is protein. That protein is derived primarily from plant sources, soybean meal is the most popular. David Loweth's animals get only plant protein, so does the herd on Bruce Bamford's Alberta ranch.

**BRUCE BAMFORD (ALBERTA RANCHER):**

I guess we're all products of our environment and how we're raised. I was raised by a father that said that, you know, cattle eat plants. That's what cattle are. They're herbivores.

**HEATHER HISCOX (REPORTER):**

Not entirely. Cattle, dairy cattle especially, are also fed protein supplements from a source linked to controversy and concern, animals, fish, poultry, pigs, and blood. The remnants of butchered animals, cleaned, dried, ground into meal and added to cattle feed.

**SERGIO TALUSO (CANADIAN FOOD INSPECTION AGENCY):**

We're not turning herbivores into carnivores.

**HEATHER HISCOX (REPORTER):**

Sergio Taluso is the feed program coordinator for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. He says it's been a long-standing practice to feed small amounts of animal protein in part because it's high quality and low cost.

**SERGIO TALUSO (CANADIAN FOOD INSPECTION AGENCY):**

Part of the other rationale is because there is a large meat processing industry in North America and these materials up really until recently in the advent of B.S.E. have been safe sources of ingredients to be used in animal feeds.

**HEATHER HISCOX (REPORTER):**

It used to be considered safe to feed meat and bone meal from sheep, cattle, and other ruminant animals that chew their cud, but that ended with the mad cow crisis in England. Thousands of cows contracted B.S.E. by eating feed made from sheep infected with a similar disease. Then people who ate contaminated meat from those cows developed the human variant and died. It took years, but Canada finally responded in 1997 with a feed ban that prohibits the use of ruminant meat and bone meal in cattle feed. The C.F.I.A. now does annual inspections in all commission feed mills.

**JOHN STAUBER (AMERICAN AUTHOR ON B.S.E.):**

We're completely out of step with what we know are the proven scientific means of addressing this problem.

**HEATHER HISCOX (REPORTER):**

American author John Stauber has been writing about B.S.E. for more than a decade. He's critical of the feed ban, thinks there are too many loopholes to stop mad cow from spreading. Under the ban, cattle parts can be used in feed for pigs and chickens. They in turn may wind up being ground up and fed back to cattle. And cattle blood can still be used in cattle feed and in milk replacement products for weaning calves.

**SERGIO TALUSO (CANADIAN FOOD INSPECTION AGENCY):**

We really don't have any evidence that those particular practices pose a risk to transmitting the disease back to ruminants.

**HEATHER HISCOX (REPORTER):**

But John Stauber says there is evidence, so better to err on the side of protecting animal and human health.

## **JOHN STAUBER (AMERICAN AUTHOR ON B.S.E.):**

The feed policy should be this: animals that are consumed by people should be vegetarians. It's really that simple. No livestock should be fed slaughterhouse waste. That's the policy that's worked in Britain and Europe.

## **HEATHER HISCOX (REPORTER):**

It's a policy that at least one branch of the Canadian government was contemplating as far back as 1998. Minutes of a Health Canada conference call obtained in 2001 under access to information cite a scientific study that found, "...blood cells can carry the agent that causes B.S.E. This has implications insofar as the current exemption of blood in the prohibition of ruminant tissues in ruminant feeds." Nothing changed then, but now strong indications it's about to soon.

## **SERGIO TALUSO (CANADIAN FOOD INSPECTION AGENCY):**

It seems that the spread of the disease is largely linked to the continued feeding of contaminated feed that we need to possibly take additional measures to change our feed ban to prevent, you know, future infections of other animals.

## **HEATHER HISCOX (REPORTER):**

David Loweth believes the feed ban will be tightened, but for the wrong reasons.

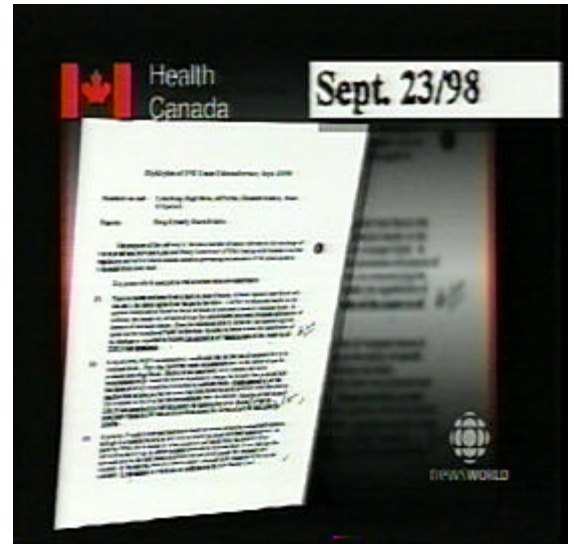
## **DAVID LOWETH (DAIRY FARMER):**

We're consumer driven. The marketplace is all-powerful. It may not be based on good science, but if that's what they want, that's the product they'll end up with. And it may cost more at the end of the day, but they'll be willing to pay that.

## **HEATHER HISCOX (REPORTER):**

And where there was reluctance in the past, now the industry seems willing to comply to regain the trust of trading partners abroad and consumers who've discovered "you are what you eat" isn't enough anymore. It's what you eat ate what counts. For "The National," I'm Heather Hiscox.

**THE END**



*The minutes (as seen above) of the Health Canada conference call were obtained under Access-to-Information legislation by Canadian Health Coalition researcher Bradford Duplisea*