

Canadian Press  
August 20, 2003

# Little change to beef industry safeguards since Mad Cow found 3 months ago

By JUDY MONCHUK

CALGARY (CP) - Three months after a lone case of mad cow disease sent Canada's beef industry into a tailspin, there have been limited changes to inspection and slaughter practices to go with questions - but no answers - on what else may be coming.

That despite recommendations for dramatically increased surveillance tests for bovine spongiform encephalopathy, the formal name for mad cow, and for tougher restrictions on animal feed. "We're working on it, but we're not alone," Alain Charette, spokesman for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, said Wednesday from Ottawa.

"We did not commit to any specific date and we will not speculate as to what the future will be."

**The delay is being applauded by the Canadian Cattlemen's Association,** which wants major input from industry and Canada's major trading partners before anything is cast in stone.

"I do not believe we should jump out in front and set a bar so high that it will make it extremely costly and not sit well with our NAFTA partners," said association president Neil Jahnke.

Since July 24, specified risk materials such as brain and spinal cord tissue, which are at high risk to carry the disease, are being removed at slaughterhouses. But Jahnke says other changes must be done cautiously.

"We sure have a lot of questions about how many cattle they want to test and how much they want to increase that surveillance," he said from Gouldtown, Sask.

"We don't want to get ahead of the U.S. and we don't want the U.S. to get ahead of us. We want a North American protocol on testing, on (specified risk materials) and on the feed ban."

International borders closed to Canadian beef almost immediately after the May 20 announcement that mad cow disease had shown up in an Alberta black Angus breeder cow. The cow didn't get into the human food chain.

The bans left 90,000 beef producers with losses of \$11 million a day for a total of \$1 billion so far. That figure doesn't include steep price drops for cattle on Canadian auction blocks or the hits that have come to related industries or rural economies.

Partial border reopenings by the United States and Mexico haven't been enough to stem the losses. The hit has been hardest felt by western producers, who account for 70 per cent of beef production.

Canada's chief veterinarian has suggested mad cow testing could be increased 25-fold to ease concerns among beef trading partners. The proposal is being discussed behind closed doors in Winnipeg this week.

A more rigorous testing regime is supported by the country's beef exporters.

But Ted Haney, president of the Canada Beef Export Federation, stresses that changes to testing and animal feed should be done in conjunction with the U.S.

"I think we're days, definitely within weeks of (those) recommendations being implemented in a combined North American fashion," Haney said, adding a U.S. study on BSE expected with the next couple of weeks should provide a template for the rules.

Barriers to Canadian beef products are slowly coming down after 34 countries slammed their borders shut in May. Mexico and the U.S. will start accepting some beef from animals under 30 months of age, but not live animals. Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago are expected to follow suit in the coming days.

Talks around lifting the ban on live cattle have been continuing with Washington and a proposal is expected by Sept. 1. Canadian officials have asked the U.S. to soften its demand that cattle under 30 months be slaughtered in a separate facility from older cattle. But the Americans say the new measures are needed to avoid cross-contamination.

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## **Key events in Canada's mad cow crisis:**

**Spring 1997:** Black Angus cow is born on one of two farms.

**Spring 1998:** Cow is sold to Heartland Livestock Services of Lethbridge, Alta., which then sells it to Stan Walterhouse of Tulliby Lake, Alta.

**Summer or fall 1998 -** Bryan Babey, who ranches with his brother north of Lloydminster, Sask., buys the cow. In four years there, she gives birth to four calves.

**2002:** Babey sells the cow, along with several other cow-calf pairs. C. J. O'Grady, a Lloydminster cattle broker, sells her to Nilsson Brothers cattle exchange, based in Vermilion, Alta.

**Aug. 23, 2002:** Marwyn Peaster, a farmer near Wanham, Alta., buys cow, along with others.

**January 2003:** Peaster notices cow is unable to stand up and ships it for slaughter.

**Jan. 31:** Cow is condemned as unfit for human consumption on the kill floor; its head is sent to lab in Fairview, Alta.

**Feb. 8:** Part of cow's brain stem arrives at Edmonton lab for testing; it's listed as low priority and put on a waiting list.

**May 12 or 13:** Tests are done on the brain.

**May 16:** Tissue shows positive for BSE and a sample is sent to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) in Winnipeg; the result is confirmed and the sample is sent to a United Kingdom lab; the Peaster ranch is quarantined.

**May 20:** British lab confirms test results; CFIA announces cow was infected with BSE; the United States immediately closes its borders to Canadian beef and cattle and 33 more countries eventually follow suit, cutting off almost all of Canada's export market; cost in lost exports later pegged at \$11 million a day; "I want to stress from the beginning this is one cow," Federal Agriculture Minister Lyle Vanclief tells reporters in a news conference punctuated by testy exchanges over why it took four months to confirm the BSE. "We have been hiding nothing," says Vanclief.

**May 21:** Saskatchewan Agriculture Minister Clay Serby says the infected cow may have spent some of its life in that province. Mel McCrea from Baldwinton, Sask., gets a phone call telling him his ranch must be quarantined.

**May 22:** Quarantine increases to nine farms - seven in Alberta, two in Saskatchewan; investigators look at two possible birthplaces for infected cow.

**May 23:** Investigation expands to British Columbia, where three farms are put under quarantine because chicken feed made from the infected cow was sent there; another farm in Alberta is added, for a total of 13.

**May 24:** Three more farms in Alberta are put under quarantine, for a total of 16 - 11 in Alberta, two in Saskatchewan and three in B.C.

**May 25:** CFIA announces initial test results came back negative for rest of Peaster's herd; one more Alberta farm is put under quarantine, bringing the total to 17.

**May 29:** Ontario, and Quebec consider shutting their borders to Alberta beef cattle and beef. McCrea's 250 cattle are taken for slaughter and mad cow testing.

**June 3:** Another 650 animals on five Alberta farms are marked for slaughter after CFIA is unable to confirm birthplace of cow.

**June 4:** CFIA announces none of the 60 cattle slaughtered from three B.C. farms had BSE; investigation extends to U.S. because five bulls linked to the infected cow were sold there in 1997.

**June 5:** Test results show none of the 1,200 animals slaughtered so far have BSE; the five bulls sold to the U.S. test negative.

**June 6:** Four international inspectors arrive to review Canada's BSE investigation; CFIA slaughters 900 cattle - from 25 non-quarantined farms in Saskatchewan and Alberta - that may be related to the infected cow or ate the same feed as she did in 1995-96.

**June 9:** Final BSE test results come back negative; the quarantines on the three B.C. farms are lifted.

**June 17:** Vanclief announces a compensation package of up to \$460 million to the beef industry; the package is cost shared 60-40 by the federal and provincial governments; \$50 million of the package is to buy beef products that had been sitting in commercial freezers since the crisis began.

**June 20:** Alberta feedlot owners sell hamburger for a dollar a pound in Alberta and Saskatchewan to try to get the beef industry moving again; a Calgary group sells almost 19,300 kilograms (42,500 pounds) of hamburger in 90 minutes.

**June 26:** The international panel reviewing CFIA's investigation recommends Canada stop using cattle tissues where disease may be found, outlaw feeding meat and bone meal to cattle and improve monitoring of herds; Vanclief promises to review and, if necessary, revise the rules as soon as possible.

**July 3:** A final report by CFIA says there's a slight possibility the infected cow came from cattle imported from the U.S. six years ago.

**July 10:** Canadian agriculture ministers say no additional aid money and no tough measures planned over border closures; Japan destroys \$10 million worth of beef products imported after the infected cow was discovered.

**July 12:** Vanclief reports little headway in meeting with Japanese counterpart Yoshiyuki Kamei on getting the ban lifted, adding: "I'm frustrated scientific data isn't getting through to the world."

**July 14:** Alberta Premier Ralph Klein states his frustration with Japanese beef ban and offers to pay \$10 billion to a Japanese citizen who comes to Canada and gets ill due to beef traced back to mad cow.

**July 18:** Vanclief announces changes to slaughter rules as recommended by international experts panel: cattle tissues at high risk to carry BSE - notably brain and spinal cord - must be removed at the slaughterhouse for cattle older than two and a half years.

**July 25:** McDonald's fast food restaurants in Canada announce they will use domestic beef to help the beleaguered industry; the move follows earlier announcement from rivals Burger King and A&W to increase use of homegrown beef at Canadian outlets.

**July 26:** More than 2,000 people from Alberta, Saskatchewan and Montana - many wearing "Neighbours Helping Neighbours" T-shirts - rally at the Coutts border crossing in southern Alberta to show support for getting the border reopened. It is one of many such rallies held across the Prairies during the crisis.

**July 29:** Ralph Goodale, Saskatchewan's lone federal cabinet minister, makes headlines with open letter saying the ban has more to do with trade than health and sends a message to "shoot, shovel and shut up" instead of reporting future BSE cases; Vanclief meets again with Japanese counterpart Kamei on lifting ban but reports no progress.

**July 30:** Saskatchewan's petition drive to urge U.S. President George W. Bush to reopen the border stumbles out of the gate by the accidental release of an internal memo from a party researcher that slights Bush by calling him "Shrub" and refers to the petition drive as "flimflam"; the researcher later resigns.

**August 7:** Former prime minister Brian Mulroney agrees to come along as adviser as part of a Tory-sponsored proposal for an all-party delegation to lobby U.S. politicians to re-open border. There is no response from the Liberals.

**August 8:** The U.S. and Mexico partially lift the ban on some Canadian beef, allowing some beef products but no live cattle; beef is expected to begin crossing the border as early as the end of the month; news is greeted with cautious optimism: "This (partial lifting) is not going to turn things around overnight for us," says Ron Axelson of the Alberta Cattle Feeders Association.

**August 11:** Beef industry spokesman Brian Nilsson tells a House of Commons committee that the glut of Canadian beef caused by the crisis has not seen a reduction in the price for high-end cuts (sirloin and T-bone steaks) because Canadians are still gobbling up those cuts as fast as they can be shipped.

**August 18:** The Foreign Affairs Department announces that Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago will soon accept Canadian beef products again.

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## **Quotes from key developments during the first three months of Canada's mad cow crisis.**

*"As part of its ongoing surveillance program for BSE, Alberta agricultural officials tested an eight-year-old cow that had been condemned at slaughter and removed it from the food system."*

**- Federal Agriculture Minister Lyle Vanclief announces May 20 Canada's first case of mad cow disease in more than a decade.**

*"(United States Department of Agriculture) is placing Canada under its BSE restriction guidelines and will not accept any ruminants or ruminant products from Canada pending further investigation."*

**- U.S. Agriculture Secretary Anne Veneman announcing May 20 the U.S. was shutting its borders to Canadian beef because of the mad cow scare.**

*"I would offer a billion - well maybe five billion (dollars) to have a Japanese person come over here and eat nothing but Canadian beef for a year. If he gets mad cow disease, we'd be glad to give him \$5 billion - well, make that \$10 billion. It ain't going to happen!"*

**- Alberta Premier Ralph Klein on July 14 expressing frustration at Japan's refusal to lift its ban on Canadian beef.**

*"The auction market industry is at a standstill, cash flow has stopped and we are on our knees - the same as the rest of the industry. We are bleeding millions of dollars each week."*

**- Alberta feedlot owner Terry Schetzle on July 15 on the struggle to survive the mad cow scare.**

*"The OIE (the international agency for animal health issues) should be very worried that the maltreatment of a conscientious country like Canada in this BSE recovery period will encourage every other country to adopt the 'Triple-S' approach to avoid animal health issues: Shoot, shovel, and shut up! And that would spell real trouble worldwide."*

**- Saskatchewan Liberal MP Ralph Goodale on July 29, accusing the international community of not treating Canada fairly over mad cow disease.**

*"We have a lot of work to do, but we made a big step today."*

**- Federal Agriculture Minister Lyle Vanclief on August 8, reacting to the American decision to partially reopen the border to Canadian beef.**

*"I think we can have a drink of champagne, but I don't know that we can drink the whole bottle, because we have a lot of work ahead of us."*

**- Saskatchewan feedlot operator Brad Wildeman reacting August 8 to the partial lifting of the beef ban by the U.S.**