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Officials expect blood in feed ban

By Michelle Lang

Beef industry officials expect Canada to ban the use of animal blood in cattle feed following a U.S. announcement that regulators south of the border are discontinuing the controversial practice.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration said Monday it is eliminating blood and poultry litter from feed because of the first American case of mad cow disease, discovered Dec. 23 in a Washington state dairy cow.

Ottawa is planning its own feed ban on animal blood and had intended to make the announcement in conjunction with the U.S., according to the Canadian Cattlemen's Association.

"I'm not sure what happened (to the joint announcement)," said Dennis Laycraft of the association, "but we expect Canada to move ahead within the next week or so."

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency, which regulates animal feed, refused comment on the issue. Meanwhile, officials who are investigating the Washington cow, which was born in Alberta, have found three animals on Canadian farms that are associated with the sick cow.

The cattle came from the same Calmar, Alberta, farm as the Washington cow, but were sold to two Canadian farms, said George Luterbach, a veterinary official with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

The three cows will be destroyed in the coming weeks so their brain tissue can be tested for signs of the disease, he said. Their remains will be incinerated.

"These animals are all currently healthy, but being born and (having) consumed feed at roughly the same time as the infected animal, they are deemed to be the animals of greatest risk," said Luterbach.

Other livestock on the two Canadian farms were not quarantined.

The American decision to ban animal blood in feed follows heavy criticism of the practice. Cattle become infected with mad cow by eating the remains of other diseased cattle and, in 1997, both the U.S. and Canada banned the use of ruminant tissue in feed.

But both countries exempted cattle blood -- which is considered a source of protein -- from the feed ban. Critics attacked the policy as a potentially deadly loophole in feeding restrictions.

"It's reckless," said Bradford Duplisea of the Canadian Health Coalition, a health advocacy group.

"We should have banned the recycling of all animal protein back in 1996. The fact that we're allowing cattle blood in cattle feed is just unacceptable."

Canadian officials have said the practice is safe because there are no documented cases of mad cow disease being transmitted through blood. But Laycraft said Ottawa will announce the ban because "we felt it would be prudent to remove it."

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration also said it is banning poultry litter and leftover meat from restaurants in cattle feed. Brain, skull, eyes, spinal cord of cattle 30 months or older will also be banned from FDA-regulated food and cosmetics. All small intestine and tonsils from cattle, regardless of age, will be prohibited. Canada has similar restrictions in place.

Both Canada and the U.S. are fighting to regain access to international markets that have closed their doors to beef exports from the two countries. More than 30 nations barred Canadian beef after an animal with mad cow disease was discovered on a northern Alberta farm May 20.

The U.S. lost most of its cattle export markets after the Washington cow was found late last year.

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