

CBC Website News (October 1, 2004)

BSE-infected cow may have gotten into animal feed

OTTAWA - The diseased cow that sparked Canada's mad cow crisis in May 2003 was turned into feed and may have been mistakenly fed to other cows, CBC News has learned.

Documents obtained through Access to Information show the Canadian Food Inspection Agency had discovered cattle at a number of farms were eating feed intended only for pigs and chickens. That feed may have contained the rendered remains of the diseased cow.

In 1997, the federal government banned the practice of allowing cattle to be ground up and fed back to other cattle, because it could spread bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

By the time BSE was confirmed in the suspect cow, it had already been made into feed.

The agency estimated that feed was sold to as many as 1,800 farms and launched an investigation. They visited 200 cattle operations and found several cases where cows were exposed to the feed.

Three cattle farms were quarantined and 63 cattle destroyed.

Inspectors also learned there was frequent cross-contamination of chicken and cattle feed, and in one case, the farmer admitted he routinely gave chicken feed to cows.

The latest research shows just a milligram of infected feed is needed to trigger BSE in a cow, said Neil Cashman, professor of neurological disease at the University of Toronto.

According to Cashman, Canada should not be feeding any animals any material rendered from a cow because feed mix-ups are so common. He adds that the risk to humans is infinitesimal.

Cattle remains are still used as pig and chicken feed, but concerns about cross-contamination persist.

In June of last year, a group of international scientists urged Canada to stop recycling the most potentially infectious parts of cows, like the spinal column and the brain, into animal feed.

The agency consulted industry, farmers, and trading partners about such a ban, but nothing has been put in place, says Sergio Taluso, spokesperson for the food inspection agency.

One lobby group argued changes must come now.

"The only way to stop the transmission is to stop recycling animal protein into herbivores," said Mike McBain, of the Canadian Health Coalition.

"And the [food inspection agency] has refused to do that because it's waiting for the signal from industry instead of intervening and telling industry what to do," said McBain.

Canadian Press (October 1, 2004)

Rules banning BSE-risk materials from animal feed on the way: Agriculture Minister

BY TIM COOK

REGINA (CP) - Rules banning the use of cow brain, eyes and backbone in all animal feed will be published in the next few weeks, the federal agriculture minister said Friday.

Andy Mitchell was responding to a CBC report that highlighted how cattle can sometimes be exposed to feed containing rendered material from other cattle, increasing the risk of spreading mad cow disease.

"This is something that requires a period of time to put in place," Mitchell said of the new rules. "In July we announced that we were, in fact, going to make the changes . . . Over the next little while we will move toward implementation."

It's been a long-standing practice to use rendered cattle material as protein in feed for chickens and pigs.

When a cow is rendered now, all of the carcass is used, including the brain, eyes and spinal column. But, when it comes to mad cow disease, the brain, eyes and backbone are considered specified risk materials, because they contain the prions that cause the disease.

That means that if the rendered material is fed to another cow, there is a higher chance the animal will contract the disease. In Canada, there has been a rule in place since 1997 preventing ranchers from feeding rendered cattle material to other cattle.

But when a single case of mad cow disease was found in Alberta last year, the subsequent investigation found that cows were sometimes exposed to food containing rendered cattle material despite the ban. Federal officials ordered the destruction any cattle that might have been exposed to feed containing protein from the infected animal.

Shortly after the mad cow case surfaced, the government mandated the removal of all specified risk material from cattle destined for human consumption.

An international committee brought in to review Canada's handling of the mad cow situation recommended that the same thing be done for the cattle to be used in feed.

In July the government announced that it would meet that recommendation, but has yet to do so. Mitchell offered several reasons for the delay. He said provinces need time to figure out how they are going to dispose of the unusable material and renderers need time to change their processes.

Some environmental and farm groups have used the situation to push for a ban on the use of all cattle material in animal feed.

The CBC quoted the Canadian Health Coalition as saying the only way to stop the transmission of mad cow disease is to stop the recycling of animal protein. The National Farmers Union issued a news release Friday calling for the same thing.

Canada's beef industry has been in crisis since the case of mad cow disease was found.

International borders have remained shut to imports of live Canadian cattle, costing the industry millions and leading to a backlog of animals on farms right across the country.