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United Nations criticizes BSE control measures

By Barry Wilson, Ottawa bureau

Without naming names, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization warned Jan. 12 that too many countries are too lax in attempts to control the spread of bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

It said a key step all countries should take is to ban the use of animal protein and bone meal in all animal feed - a step Canada has resisted taking, arguing it would be scientifically unnecessary and costly.

"We've had a number in recent years of isolated cases of BSE in a number of countries and (these) of course have frightened consumers so countries have to do more," said FAO animal production specialist Andrew Speedy in a statement that reacted to the latest BSE case, this time in a dairy herd in Washington state.

The cow came from Alberta.

Removing and destroying specified risk materials such as spinal cord and brain from animals older than 30 months and ending the feeding of animal protein to animals are "essential" if the disease is to be controlled, he said. "They are not particularly difficult to do but they will ensure the consumer knows that as much as possible is being done to remove BSE from the food chain.

"What we find is that most countries are not quite doing it exactly. There is a risk of cross contamination because they are still feeding meat and bone meal to pigs and poultry, for example."

Bradford Duplisea, a researcher for the Canadian Health Coalition, said Canada is one of the violators.

"It is clear there is still risk in Canada because they refuse to stop feeding animal protein to livestock," he said.

"Of course, they have not even totally banned feeding ruminant protein to cattle, since blood still is used in making feed."

The coalition also wants every slaughtered animal to be tested, although the FAO called only for increased surveillance and testing, particularly of older animals. The FAO said to try to reassure consumers worldwide, it is offering training for meat industry and inspection officials in countries where controls are inadequate.