



# NEWS RELEASE

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## **VENEMAN ANNOUNCES ADDITIONAL PROTECTION MEASURES TO GUARD AGAINST BSE**

WASHINGTON, Dec. 30, 2003—Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman today announced additional safeguards to bolster the U.S. protection systems against Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy, or BSE, and further protect public health.

“For more than a decade, the United States has had in place an aggressive surveillance, detection and response program for BSE,” said Veneman. “While we are confident that the United States has safeguards and firewalls needed to protect public health, these additional actions will further strengthen our protection systems.”

Veneman said the policies announced today have been under consideration for many months, especially since the finding of a case of BSE in Canada in May 2003. The policies will further strengthen protections against BSE by removing certain animals and specified risk material and tissues from the human food chain; requiring additional process controls for establishments using advanced meat recovery (AMR); holding meat from cattle that have been tested for BSE until the test has confirmed negative; and prohibiting the air-injection stunning of cattle.

While many cattle in the United States can be identified through a variety of systems, the Secretary also announced that USDA will begin immediate implementation of a verifiable system of national animal identification. The development of such a system has been underway for more than a year and a half to achieve uniformity, consistency and efficiency across this national system.

“USDA has worked with partners at the federal and state levels and in industry for the past year and a half on the adoption of standards for a verifiable nationwide animal identification system to help enhance the speed and accuracy of our response to disease outbreaks across many different animal species,” Veneman said. “I have asked USDA’s Chief Information Officer to expedite the development of the technology architecture to implement this system a top priority.

“These are initial steps that USDA will take to enhance our protection system,” Veneman said. “I am appointing an international panel of scientific experts to provide an objective review of our response actions and identify areas for potential additional enhancements.”

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Specifically, USDA will take the following actions:

**Downer Animals.** Effectively immediately, USDA will ban all downer cattle from the human food chain. USDA will continue its BSE surveillance program.

**Product Holding.** USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service inspectors will no longer mark cattle tested for BSE as “inspected and passed” until confirmation is received that the animals have, in fact, tested negative for BSE. This new policy will be in the form of an interpretive rule that will be published in the *Federal Register*.

To prevent the entry into commerce of meat and meat food products that are adulterated, FSIS inspection program personnel perform ante- and post-mortem inspection of cattle that are slaughtered in the United States. As part of the ante-mortem inspection, FSIS personnel look for signs of disease, including signs of central nervous system impairment. Animals showing signs of systemic disease, including those exhibiting signs of neurologic impairment, are condemned. Meat from all condemned animals has never been permitted for use as human food.

**Specified Risk Material.** Effective immediately upon publication in the *Federal Register*, USDA will enhance its regulations by declaring as specified risk materials skull, brain, trigeminal ganglia, eyes, vertebral column, spinal cord and dorsal root ganglia of cattle over 30 months of age and the small intestine of cattle of all ages, thus prohibiting their use in the human food supply. Tonsils from all cattle are already considered inedible and therefore do not enter the food supply. These enhancements are consistent with the actions taken by Canada after the discovery of BSE in May.

In an interim final rule, FSIS will require federally inspected establishments that slaughter cattle to develop, implement, and maintain procedures to remove, segregate, and dispose of these specified risk materials so that they cannot possibly enter the food chain. Plants must also make that information readily available for review by FSIS inspection personnel. FSIS has also developed procedures for verifying the approximate age of cattle that are slaughtered in official establishments. State inspected plants must have equivalent procedures in place.

**Advanced Meat Recovery.** AMR is an industrial technology that removes muscle tissue from the bone of beef carcasses under high pressure without incorporating bone material when operated properly. AMR product can be labeled as “meat.” FSIS has previously had regulations in place that prohibit spinal cord from being included in products labeled as “meat.” The regulation, effective upon publication in the *Federal Register*, expands that prohibition to include dorsal root ganglia, clusters of nerve cells connected to the spinal cord along the vertebrae column, in addition to spinal cord tissue. Like spinal cord, the dorsal root ganglia may also contain BSE infectivity if the animal is infected. In addition, because the vertebral column and skull in cattle 30 months and older will be considered inedible, it cannot be used for AMR.

In March 2003, FSIS began a routine regulatory sampling program for beef produced from AMR systems to ensure that spinal cord tissue is not present in this product. In a new interim final rule announced today, establishments have to ensure process control through verification testing to ensure that neither spinal cord nor dorsal root ganglia is present in the product.

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**Air-Injection Stunning.** To ensure that portions of the brain are not dislocated into the tissues of the carcass as a consequence of humanely stunning cattle during the slaughter process, FSIS is issuing a regulation to ban the practice of air-injection stunning.

**Mechanically Separated Meat.** USDA will prohibit use of mechanically separated meat in human food.

On Dec. 23, Veneman reported that a cow in Washington State has tested positive for BSE. A swift and comprehensive investigation is ongoing to trace the animal to a herd of origin, which is believed to be located in Alberta, Canada, as well as track additional animals that have entered the United States. (For the latest update on the investigation, visit [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov).)

For more than a decade, the United States has had in place an aggressive surveillance, detection and response program for BSE. The United States has tested over 20,000 head of cattle for BSE in each of the past two years, 47 times the recommended international standard.

Since 1989, USDA has banned imports of live ruminants and most ruminant products from the United Kingdom and other countries having BSE.

In 1997, the FDA prohibited the use of most mammalian protein, the main pathway to spread the disease should it be in the United States, in the manufacture of animal feed intended for cattle and other ruminants.

An independent analysis by Harvard in 2001 and again in 2003 shows that the risk of BSE spreading in the United States is low and any possible spread would have been reversed by the controls we have already put in place.

For more information please visit [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov).

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