



“Where’s the BEEF!”

The expression “Where’s the beef?”, popularized in a famous burger commercial, takes on new meaning in today’s world of heightened concern over bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE). Since Dec. 23, 2003, when the U.S. reported their first probable case of BSE, now confirmed, importing live animals and meat products from the U.S. has all but stopped. So, “Where is the beef?”

The BSE issue is a complex one that involves both human and animal health issues. Bundle in concerns linked to the family *Bovidae*, such as bison, water buffalo, sheep and goats, and the scope of affected animals and products becomes even larger. In contrast to the reaction of U.S. authorities to the Canadian BSE case in the early part of 2003, the Canadian reaction to the current U.S. case is well tempered with experience. The operative expression is “science-based restrictions.” In view of this dogma, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) drafted annexed regulations under the *Health of Animals Act* and called them “Animals of the Family Bovidae and Their Products Importation Prohibition Regulations” (AOTFBATPIPR). The restrictions on the import of “animals or things,” as the regulations state, expire on June 1, 2004. Obviously the CFIA believes that the current situation in the U.S. is a temporary one. It should also be mentioned that in August 2003, the *Food and Drug Regulations* (FDR) were amended to include a definition of BSE specified risk material (which the skull, brain, trigeminal ganglia, eyes, tonsils, spinal cord and dorsal root ganglia of animals aged 30 months or older, and the distal ileum of animals of all ages) and restrictions on the importing of foods containing these into Canada. The basic difference between the FDR and the AOTFBATPIPR definitions of specified risk material is that under the latter it includes material from the family *Bovidae* and that under the FDR it includes only cattle.

Under the AOTFBATPIPR regulations the following would be prohibited from being imported from the U.S.: live animals of the family *Bovidae*; meat or meat products derived from animals of the family *Bovidae* and things containing such meat or meat products; ingredients derived from animals of the family *Bovidae* to be used in animal food and animal food containing those ingredients; ingredients, other than manure, derived from animals of the family *Bovidae* to be used

in fertilizer and fertilizer containing those ingredients and *Bovinae* (the sub-family of *Bovidae*) specified risk material.

Among the many items under the AOTFBATPIPR regulations that would not be prohibited from being imported include but are not limited to: boneless meat of animals of the family *Bovidae* under 30 months of age; products of a rendering plant imported into Canada under a *Health of Animal Regulations* permit; meat and meat products originating in Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, New Zealand or Uruguay that are processed or are in transit through the U.S., a food containing meat or a meat product that is of insignificant quantity in regard to the nature of the food and the nature of the meat or meat product in the food, milk and milk derivatives; things produced by subjecting bones and tissues, other than tissues from *Bovidae* specified risk material, to rigorous processes of extraction and purification; finished pet chews, such as dried processed ears, pizzles, hooves or tendons, that are not made from *Bovidae* specified risk material or from a vertebral column; commercially prepared pet food that does not contain ingredients derived from animals of the sub-family *Bovinae*; and protein-free tallow with a maximum level of insoluble impurities of 0.15 per cent in weight and derivatives made from such tallow.

Now that that is clear, we can go about our business! Although the new regulations do provide clarity over the initial “widespread” restrictions, there are also procedural issues to be sorted out between United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and CFIA. Just how, for example, is boneless beef from animals under 30 months of age going to be certified by the USDA for export to Canada? Not all the pieces of the picture are together yet to make the new regulations work as smoothly as they appear.

The new regulations are at least a step forward in managing the continuing saga of BSE, which has shaped the news in 2003 and is doing so again in 2004. With avian flu in Asia and albeit a less severe strain now in the U.S., 2004 is going to be a banner year for animal and human health issues.

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