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Canada Official: US Mad Cow Links To Canada 'Premature'

DOW JONES NEWSWIRES

TORONTO (AP)--It's too early to say whether the first cow in the U.S. found to have mad cow disease came from Canada, a top Canadian official said Saturday.

"It would be premature to draw such conclusions at this time," Dr. Brian Evans, chief veterinary officer of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, told reporters in Ottawa.

"What we're dealing with at this point in time is not full-bodied information," he said. "We want to be thorough, we want to be accurate...that's what the U.S. expects of us and that's what we expect of them."

Evans spoke in response to a U.S. announcement hours earlier indicating the sick cow in Washington originated from Alberta, Canada. He stressed the importance of determining when the suspect cow was born, noting that Canadian and U.S. records outlining the cow's history didn't match.

Canadian papers show the cow had two calves before it was shipped to the U.S., which wasn't documented by U.S. officials.

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Also, Canadian papers say the diseased cow was 6 1/2-years-old - older than U.S. officials had thought. U.S. records say the cow was 4- or 4 1/2-years-old.

The age is significant because the animal may have been born before the U.S. and Canada in 1997 banned certain feed, which is considered the most likely source of infection.

"Whatever the outcome (of the investigation)...we will work closely with U.S. and international colleagues to deal with what is clearly a North American and global issue."

Canada was still recovering from a brush with mad cow disease it had in May when the U.S. detected its case earlier this week.

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