

December 24, 2003

**WORLD NEWS**

# Nations Ban U.S. Beef Imports On News of Mad-Cow Disease

## U.S. Officials Scramble to Trace Origins Of Cow's Infection; Meat Recall Is Issued

Associated Press

WASHINGTON -- Federal officials raced on Wednesday to find out where a Washington state cow, apparently infected with mad-cow disease, was born and where it may have been infected.

Even as the investigation continued, officials sought to reassure Americans about the safety of the nation's food supply. That didn't stop several nations from banning U.S. beef, including Japan, Taiwan, China and Mexico.

U.S. Agriculture Department officials told a briefing that the cow joined the Washington state herd in October 2001 and was culled from other cows Dec. 9, after she became paralyzed, apparently as a result of calving.

### VALUE OF U.S. BEEF EXPORTS

For 2002, in thousands of U.S. dollars:

<b>Japan</b>	843,021
<b>South Korea</b>	609,742
<b>Mexico</b>	595,691
<b>Canada</b>	286,282
<b>Hong Kong &amp; China</b>	72,097
<b>Taiwan</b>	49,774
<b>Russia</b>	14,613
<b>World</b>	2,585,373

*Retail equivalent value of U.S. beef industry in 2002: \$65 billion.*

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Meat Export Federation*

#### MAD-COW DISEASE

- [Read the text](#)<sup>1</sup> of the briefing on discovery of mad-cow disease in the U.S.
- [See a chart](#)<sup>2</sup> from the World Organization for Animal Health, a European body that analyzes veterinary data, detailing the number of reported cases world-wide.
- [Case of Mad Cow Is Found in U.S.](#)<sup>3</sup>

But because the brain-wasting disease is usually transmitted through contaminated feed and has an incubation period four to five years, it is "important to focus on the feed where she was born" in 1999, USDA chief veterinarian Ron DeHaven said.

#### Mexico Bars Live U.S. Cattle

The impact was evident almost immediately: Japan, the world's top importer of U.S. beef in terms of value,

imposed an indefinite ban and planned to recall certain meat products already on the market, while South Korea halted customs inspections of American beef and suspended sales for meat already on

supermarket shelves.

---

## DOW JONES REPRINTS

---

 This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers, use the Order Reprints tool at the bottom of any article or visit: [www.djreprints.com](http://www.djreprints.com). • [See a sample reprint in PDF format](#) • [Order a reprint of this article now](#).

---

Mexico, Russia, Brazil, Australia, Taiwan, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, China and Chile also banned the imports, as did the Chinese territory of Hong Kong.

Mexico, which imports the largest quantity of American beef -- 384,900 tons, also banned the import of live cattle from the U.S. The U.S. shipped 106,000 head of cattle to Mexico last year.

"This is a precautionary measure, in which Mexico is saying "stop everything" and we'll study the situation," said Javier Trujillo, director of safety and inspection for Mexico's Agriculture Department. "We're even going to send inspectors to Washington state and once we know the exact dimensions, we will decide if we maintain it."

In Brussels, the European Union, which already bans much U.S. beef because of fears about growth hormones, said it would not take any additional measures.

### Other Animals Are Quarantined

Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman said tissue samples from the diseased cow were put aboard a commercial jet expected to arrive in England Wednesday for conclusive tests of the preliminary diagnosis. She said results of those tests could be available in three to five days.

She said the animal fell ill on at large dairy farm with two sites and 4,000 cows in southern Washington state. All the animals on this farm have been quarantined by the state. If the preliminary testing confirms the preliminary finding, it is likely that other cows in the herd will be slaughtered.

President Bush, who is with his family at Camp David for Christmas, has been receiving regular updates on the situation, a White House spokesman said. He spoke with Ms. Veneman again on Wednesday, and will be getting briefings on the incident later in the day, the spokesman said.

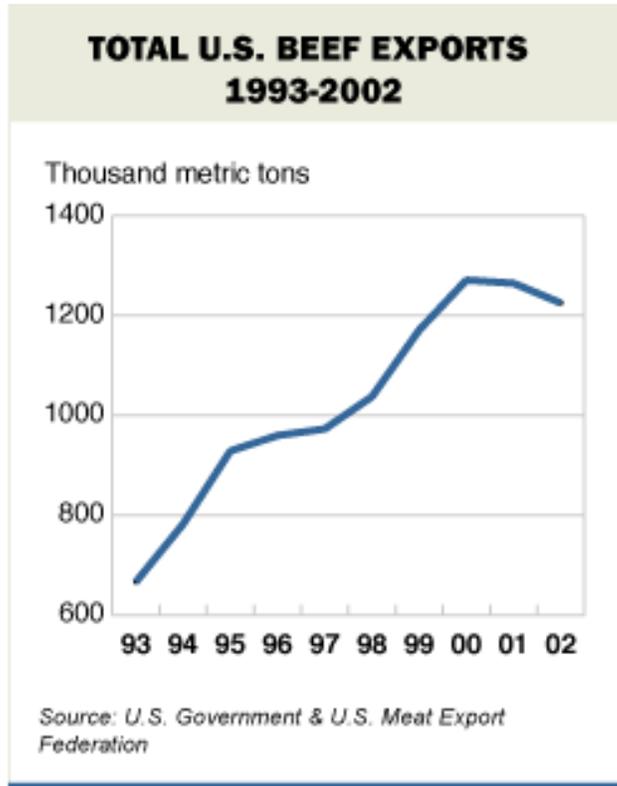
Agriculture Department officials and cattle industry executives tried to allay fears that American beef supplies had become infected, saying the U.S. inspection system was working effectively: The farm where the cow originated has been quarantined and officials were tracing the movement of the cow from the farm to the slaughterhouse, and the flow of the meat to processing plants.

"The important point is that the high-risk materials -- that is, the brain and spinal column that would cause infectivity in humans -- were removed from this cow," Ms. Veneman said on ABC's "Good

Morning America" Wednesday.

She noted that the U.S. since the early 1990s has banned the use of cow and sheep byproducts for animal feed, which cuts off a major mode of transmission of the disease.

USDA officials announced early Wednesday that Vern's Moses Lake Meat Co., a distributor in Moses Lake, Wash., is voluntarily recalling approximately 10,410 pounds of raw beef that may have been exposed to tissues containing mad cow. They said the beef was produced on Dec. 9 and shipped to several establishments for further processing and is being recalled "out of an abundance of caution" even though it "would not be expected to be infected or have an adverse public health impact."



The department's Food Safety and Inspection Service said it is continuing its investigation to ensure that all the recalled beef is correctly identified and tracked, but gave no further details immediately. There was no answer at the telephone number listed for Vern's Moses Lake Meat Co.

Ms. Veneman also assured Americans that no foul play was suspected, saying "this incident is not terrorist-related."

Appearing on CBS' "The Early Show," Ms. Veneman asserted, "The risk is extremely low to human health and I would without hesitation say that no one should be afraid to eat beef."

Mad-cow disease eats holes in the brains of cattle. It sprang up in Britain in 1986 and spread through countries in Europe and Asia, prompting massive destruction of

herds and decimating the European beef industry.

People can contract a form of mad-cow disease if they eat infected beef or nerve tissue, and possibly through blood transfusions. The human form of mad-cow disease so far has killed 143 people in Britain and 10 elsewhere, none in the U.S.

### Risks to Humans 'Extremely Low'

Ms. Veneman said the risk to human health in this U.S. case was "extremely low." Nonetheless, U.S. beef producers worried that they could suffer heavily from a mad cow scare. Restaurants that serve beef also could be affected.

"I think it has the potential to hurt our industry," said Jim Olson, a rancher in Stanfield, Ariz., who owns about 150 cattle.

Consumers Union, the publisher of Consumer Reports magazine, called on the government to test more cows for the disease, formally known as bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

"The U.S. needs to be far more proactive in protecting the American food supply," said Michael Hansen, a senior research associate. "We are very concerned that the diseased animal made it into the food supply and that the processing plants could be contaminated."

The disease was found in a Holstein cow, which could not move on its own, from a farm in Mabton, Wash., about 40 miles southeast of Yakima. A government source familiar with the investigation said that the cow came from Sunny Dene Ranch in Mabton.

Tissue samples were taken on Dec. 9, and eventually tested positive for BSE. Parts of the cow that would be infected -- the brain, the spinal cord and the lower part of the small intestine -- were removed before the animal went to a meat processing plant, standard operating procedure in the U.S.

Many residents of Mabton -- population 2,045 -- were protective of local cattle owners Tuesday and unwilling to discuss the matter with reporters, who were turned away from businesses and farms.

The apparent discovery of mad-cow disease comes at a time when the U.S. beef industry is flourishing, in part because imports from Canada dried up after a single case of the disease was found there last spring and also in part because of the popularity of the Atkins high-protein diet .

A USDA Choice sirloin steak sells for more than \$6 per pound, compared with about \$4 per pound a year ago. The price of pound of ground beef is \$2.04, up from \$1.84 last year.

"The beef cattle industry has just had a resurgence of growth," said Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman Thad Cochran (R., Miss.). "This is going to be a setback."

Some American consumers said Tuesday they weren't ready to find something else for dinner. "We're beef eaters," said Carrie Whitacre of Omaha, Neb. "Plus we're not going to get beef from Washington state here anytime soon."

Caroline Smith DeWaal, food safety director of the Center for Science in the Public Interest, said that while whole cuts of meat should be safe, there could be problems with ground meat, which can be mechanically stripped from the bone near an infected part. "USDA needs to take swift action to insure that the meat that is found in hot dogs, hamburgers and those others doesn't pose a risk," Ms. DeWaal said.

The beef industry said there was nothing to worry about.

"The infectious agent is only found in the central nervous system tissue," said Patti Brumbach, executive director of the Washington State Beef Commission. "None of that made it into the beef supply. I think once consumers understand that the beef supply is safe, it should be a short-term concern."

*Copyright © 2003 Associated Press*

**URL for this article:**

<http://online.wsj.com/article/0,,SB107228184626380600,00.html>

**Hyperlinks in this Article:**

(1) <http://online.wsj.com/article/0,,SB107223071470912100,00.html>

(2) [http://www.oie.int/eng/info/en\\_esbmonde.htm](http://www.oie.int/eng/info/en_esbmonde.htm)

(3) <http://online.wsj.com/article/0,,SB107221775685324400,00.html>

*Updated December 24, 2003*

**Copyright 2003 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved**

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by our **Subscriber Agreement** and by copyright law. For non-personal use or to order multiple copies, please contact Dow Jones

Reprints at 1-800-843-0008 or visit [www.djreprints.com](http://www.djreprints.com).