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Washington State Dairy Farm Quarantined After BSE Report

DOW JONES NEWSWIRES

MABTON, Washington (AP)--A dairy farm near this south central Washington town was under quarantine after federal officials received preliminary test results indicating an animal had mad cow disease.

"We are taking all necessary steps to assure the protection of the health and safety of our citizens and our state's livestock industry," Gov. Gary Locke said.

USDA officials said the affected cow was a "downer," meaning it couldn't walk. Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman said the slaughtered cow was screened earlier this month and any diseased parts were removed before they could enter the food supply and infect humans.

They did not disclose the name or exact location of the farm. There are dozens of dairy farms in the area.

If follow-up tests confirm the initial results, it would be the first case of mad cow disease in U.S. history. Also known as bovine spongiform encephalopathy, the disease eats holes in the brains of cattle. Outbreaks decimated the European beef industry and killed more than 100 people in the 1980s.

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About 150 miles (240 kilometers) west of Mabton, the Midway Meats plant -where authorities believe the cow was deboned -appeared to be operating at full blast late Tuesday afternoon, with workers loading meat into trucks, and fresh blood running out of the slaughterhouse into a drain.

A man who refused to give his name escorted an Associated Press reporter off the property, located in

Centralia.

"I wish somebody had let me know something about this," Midway Meats owner William Sexsmith told The Chronicle of Centralia.

Calls to Midway Meats and to Sexsmith's home by the AP were not immediately returned Tuesday.

Federal authorities believe the cow was deboned at Midway Meats, before its flesh was sent to two other facilities: Willamette Valley Meats in Portland, Oregon, and Interstate Meat in Federal Way, Washington. It was not immediately clear where the animal was slaughtered.

Willamette declined to comment on Tuesday. A message left at Interstate Meat was not immediately returned.

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