

December 31, 2003

MAD COW HITS THE U.S.**Cattle Feed Comes Under Scrutiny**By **JOSEPH T. HALLINAN**Staff Reporter of **THE WALL STREET JOURNAL**

Amid the uproar over last week's discovery of a case of mad-cow disease in the U.S., a controversy is brewing over the use of animal leftovers in cattle feed.

Feed containing ground-up remains of other animals, a relatively cheap source of protein, is the suspected means of transmission of the brain-wasting disease among cattle.

As a result, since 1997, the U.S. government has banned the use of such byproducts in food intended for other so-called ruminants, such as cows, deer and sheep. In essence, the government said, animals can't eat their own.

The U.S., however, still allows cattle remnants to be placed in pig and chicken feed. And the dispute between critics and the beef industry now centers on whether that practice unnecessarily increases the risk that a cow, which in turn may be fed the ground-up remains of poultry or pigs, will end up infected by mad-cow disease after all.

MAD-COW HITS THE U.S.

1

See [full coverage](#)² of the first mad-cow case in the U.S.

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. • [See a sample reprint in PDF format](#) • [Order a reprint of this article now](#).

The risk of such a feed mix-up may be smaller than some people believe. In part, that is because farming has become more specialized, with many farms raising only one kind of livestock. In addition, as many farmers are now finding, the economic consequences of a slip-up can be severe, prompting the cattle industry to take extra precautions.

"There's millions and millions of dollars that are going to be lost," says Tom Deters, livestock marketing manager at F.S. Total Livestock Services in the southern Illinois community of Effingham. For years, he says, it has been standard practice among his customers, once they plan to sell their cattle, to have him sign a certification that the feed the cattle have eaten contained no prohibited substances.

Nonetheless, groups like the Consumer Federation of America, a not-for-profit organization based in Washington, want to see byproducts from cattle and similar animals removed from all livestock feed. "That would improve public confidence in the feed supply," says Carol Tucker Foreman, the organization's director of food policy.

Why feed animals other animals in the first place? The use of animal byproducts in livestock feed is partly driven by the tremendous amount of animal waste produced in this country. On average, according to the National Renderers Association, the nation's slaughterhouses, packing plants, supermarkets, butcher shops and restaurants generate about 44,000 tons of animal byproducts each week.

In the case of cattle, about 45% of the weight of the animal is left over after butchering. These leftovers and those of other animals are ground up and "rendered" or cooked. Water is evaporated during the cooking and what is left is turned into one of two products: fats and oils, or a solid material about the consistency of brown sugar known as meat and bone meal.

This substance provides a cheap source of animal protein for the makers of animal feed. Last year, according to the renderers group, 3.2 billion pounds of meat and bone meal was sold in the U.S., most of it for use in animal food, at prices that have recently ranged between \$230 and \$265 a ton.

About 50 million tons of dairy and beef feed is sold annually in the U.S. Until the 1997 change in regulations, this feed often contained the remains of cattle and other ruminants. The nation's big feed makers responded since then by substituting other sources of protein in their cattle feed. For instance, the nation's No. 1 feed manufacturer, Land O'Lakes Farmland Feed, Arden Hills, Minn., uses soybeans and byproducts derived from pigs and chickens.

But feed intended for other animals, like pigs, can still contain ground-up cow remains. And a concern is that this cow-containing food could be eaten by cows.

Dairy cows eat a lot more manufactured feed than beef cattle, and dairy cows are kept around to a much older age than the typical beef cow.

Pig feed, generally speaking, is cheaper than cattle feed. Prices vary, but pig feed sells for around \$200 a ton, whereas cattle feed sells for between \$250 and \$300 a ton.

Mike Hutjens, professor of animal sciences and a dairy specialist at the University of Illinois, says dairy farmers have little incentive to give their cows pig feed. First, it wouldn't have the right nutrients. Cows, for instance, need a lot of fiber in their diet; pigs don't. After a few days on pig feed, he says, cows would get sick and their milk production would plummet.

Second, pig feed doesn't contain additives cows need. Cows need about half a pound a day of baking soda added to their feed. That neutralizes stomach acid. Without it, cows get an upset stomach, stop eating and curtail milk production.

Also, some of the additives pig feed can contain, such as antibiotics, can end up as residue in the cow's

milk, a costly consequence. The dairy plant that buys the farmer's milk tests each load.

If the milk is found contaminated with residue, the farmer has to buy back the whole load, typically at a cost of about \$2,400. In addition, the farmer would face fines from the state.

Besides, he says, dairy farms rarely have pigs anymore. Pig farming has become specialized and large-scale, making the farm with dairy cows and pigs a thing of the past, he said. "It hardly occurs at all."

Write to Joseph T. Hallinan at joseph.hallinan@wsj.com³

URL for this article:

<http://online.wsj.com/article/0,,SB107283665988415800,00.html>

Hyperlinks in this Article:

(1) http://online.wsj.com/page/0,,2_1059,00.html

(2) http://online.wsj.com/page/0,,2_1059,00.html

(3) <mailto:joseph.hallinan@wsj.com>

Updated December 31, 2003

Copyright 2004 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.