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UPDATE: US Quarantines 3rd Herd In Mad Cow Probe

DOW JONES NEWSWIRES

(Adds Department of Agriculture official saying at least some of the quarantined animals will be destroyed.)

WASHINGTON (AP)--U.S. authorities have quarantined a third herd of Washington state cattle in a widening investigation of mad cow disease after they located another cow from the same Canadian herd as the infected cow.

At least some cows quarantined since the discovery last month of a Holstein with the brain-wasting disease will be destroyed, either because of possible exposure to the infection or to quell public fear, Dr. Ron DeHaven, the Agriculture Department's chief veterinarian, said Friday.

"It would be safe to assume that...some or all those animals will need to be sacrificed," DeHaven said of the quarantined cattle. A decision on the first cows to be killed will be made soon, he said.

Results of DNA testing that should determine conclusively whether the original sick cow was born in Alberta, Canada, in April 1997 are expected next week, DeHaven said.

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The herd put under quarantine in the last day or two is at a dairy farm in Mattawa, near Yakima, where investigators traced one of 80 cows that entered the United States with the diseased Holstein in late 2001.

Another nine cows and a calf born last month to the sick cow are on the Mabton, Wash., dairy farm that was the Holstein's final home. Another calf is on a farm at Sunnyside, Wash., also near Yakima, that raises bull calves.

Investigators are trying to find cows from the same herd because the most likely source of infection was contaminated feed that the Holstein ate as a calf, DeHaven said. She was born before August 1997, when cow parts were prohibited from cattle feed in the U.S. and Canada.

Both countries limited the contents of feed to reduce the chances of infecting cattle through the food chain.

U.S. officials have stressed that the diseased cow's age and the date of the feed ban suggest the infection occurred in Canada. This idea, if proven, would underline the effectiveness of the ban and, what is more important, would allow U.S. authorities to place the root of the problem north of the border, in Canada.

The offspring of the sick cow are under quarantine because mother-to-calf transmission is considered unlikely but cannot be ruled out. DeHaven said investigators also are trying to trace the cow's mother and siblings.

Other cows ultimately may be killed, too, DeHaven said.

"Even though we know with a very good degree of certainty that there's no direct disease spread animal-to-animal, simply being on the same farm there are some public perception issues related to those animals," he said.

The government typically pays up to market value for animals that it condemns to death to contain a disease. USDA officials have said they have yet to formulate a payment plan.

Mad cow disease, or bovine spongiform encephalopathy, is a threat because humans can develop a brain-wasting illness, variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, from consuming beef products contaminated with BSE. Although 153 people worldwide have contracted that illness, most in the U.K., it has never been diagnosed in someone from the U.S.

Including the stricken Holstein, 81 animals were believed shipped across the border from the same Alberta farm in 2001.

On the Net:

Agriculture Department BSE pages: <http://www.usda.gov/news/releases/2003/06/resources.html>

URL for this article:

http://online.wsj.com/article/0,,BT_CO_20040102_002776,00.html

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