

**For information on
13 July 2004**

LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

**Restriction on Importation of Beef from Countries
Infected with Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy**

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the latest situation regarding the restrictions on the import of beef from countries which have reported case of cattle being infected with Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) (also known as “mad-cow disease”).

Background

2. Under the Imported Game, Meat and Poultry Regulations of the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap 132), it is specified that each consignment of imported beef must be accompanied by an official health certificate stating that the meat is fit for human consumption. On the control of BSE, special health attestation is required by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) for countries with BSE, taking reference from recommendations by international authorities including the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE). The principle is that the BSE agent should be prevented from entering the human food chain. OIE provides recommendations on health assurance for imported beef and beef products, depending on the assessment of the BSE status of the cattle population of a country or zone. Criteria to be considered include risk assessment for identifying all potential factors for BSE occurrence (e.g. use of meat-and-bone meal), BSE surveillance and monitoring system, reporting and investigation of suspected cattle, and incidence of BSE. High risk parts which are defined as Specified Risk Materials, e.g. brain, eyes, tonsils, spinal cord and intestine, etc. should be prevented from human consumption. FEHD will consider the risk status of the cattle population of the import country according to OIE recommendations and impose appropriate sanitary requirements on the beef from these countries to ensure public health.

Countries from which import of beef are restricted

3. In March 1996, importation of beef from the United Kingdom (UK) was suspended pursuant to the first report of Variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in the UK and its possible relationship with BSE in cattle. The UK and the European Commission subsequently implemented a series of control measures in line with OIE recommendations to prevent and control BSE in their cattle and to ensure the safety of beef. As a result, the import suspension was lifted in September 1999.

4. Importation of beef from Japan, Canada and the United States (US) was suspended in September 2001, May 2003 and December 2003 respectively due to the report of first BSE cases in these countries. The relevant authorities of these countries have been discussing with the FEHD on the control and management measures that they have implemented. FEHD will assess whether the measures being taken are in compliance with the OIE requirements. Up till now, the importation of beef from these three countries has not been resumed.

5. Hong Kong is not the only place which is still restricting the import of beef from these countries. Australia, Mainland China, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea and Thailand are amongst those countries which are still banning the import of beef and beef products from these three countries.

Way forward

6. We would consider lifting the restriction on importation from a country affected by BSE if the affected country can demonstrate that it has fully complied with our import requirements, including a satisfactory BSE management programme, as well as the relevant recommendations on the control of BSE according to the guidelines stipulated by the OIE and assures that the exported beef is safe for human consumption.

Health, Welfare and Food Bureau
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department
July 2004