

WORD FROM WASHINGTON

Mad Cow Disease: What You Should Know

(NAPSA)—Recent reports about “Mad Cow Disease” have left some people with questions about the safety of beef and milk products.

For more than a decade the U.S. has had in place an aggressive surveillance, detection and response program for BSE. In December 2003, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) initiated additional steps to enhance the current protection system.

To further address fears and concerns, the International Food Information Council (IFIC) is offering answers to some common questions:

Q. What is “Mad Cow Disease,” and when was it first discovered?

A. Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), or “Mad Cow Disease” is a rare, chronic degenerative disease affecting the brain and central nervous system of cattle. BSE is characterized by the progressive degeneration of the nervous system, with the brain tissue of affected animals appearing sponge-like under microscopic examination. Cattle with BSE lose their coordination, experience changes in behavior and develop a variety of central nervous system abnormalities. The incubation period in cattle is two to eight years. Once clinical symptoms develop, death occurs in several weeks or months, unless the afflicted animal is destroyed.

BSE first appeared in British cattle in the mid-1980s. There have been numerous cases detected in other countries. A complete list is

available from both the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the USDA.

Q. Along with eating beef, are drinking milk and consuming dairy products safe?

A. Yes. BSE has been detected only in the brain, central nervous system and in part of the intestine of affected cattle. No BSE infectivity has been detected in milk or muscle tissue, which is what we eat as beef. In fact, extensive testing has revealed that milk, including milk from cows infected with BSE, does not contain the infective agent. Thus, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), milk and milk products, such as yogurt, ice cream, or cheese, even in countries with high incidence of BSE, can be safely consumed.

Q. Do I need to change my eating habits?

A. Based on what is currently known about the human form of BSE and how it may be transmitted to humans, National Institutes of Health researchers and the Secretary of Agriculture agree that there is no reason to change dietary habits.

For a more extensive list of questions and answers on BSE, log on to www.ific.org/publications/qa/bseqa.cfm or send a S.A.S.E. to IFIC, 1100 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 430, Washington, DC 20036.
attn: BSE Q&A

Source: International Food Information Council

