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Sweden

Livestock and Products

First Swedish BSE Case Confirmed

2006

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Report Highlights:

On March 3, 2006, the EU Reference Laboratory in Weybridge, England confirmed the first case of BSE in Sweden.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
Stockholm [SW1]
[SW]

BSE Confirmed in Sweden

On March 3, 2006, the EU Reference Laboratory in Weybridge, England confirmed that Sweden is no longer a BSE-free country. Swedish authorities earlier announced preliminary test results on a 12-year-old cow from central Sweden on February 28, 2006 (see GAIN Report SW5007).

The Swedish Board of Agriculture (BOA) reported that it was possible that the cow had been fed meat and bone meal (MBM) by mistake since not all of Sweden's safety routines were in place during the first years of the infected cow's life. The animal was probably infected about ten years ago, according to the BOA. The affected farm is a beef cattle operation with 52 cows, two bulls, 25 young cattle and 22 calves. All offspring and cohorts (animals within the same age range) of the infected cow are being traced and culled.

Increased Testing for BSE?

Sweden is the only European country classified as low-risk with regard to BSE. The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) rates Sweden as a Category II country, indicating that the future risk of BSE is unlikely, but could not be excluded. All other EU countries are classified within the two higher risk categories.

As a result of its low-risk status, Sweden had received special dispensation from the EU mandatory BSE testing requirement and was only required to test at-risk animals. Since 2001, Sweden has tested all animals over 24 months that have been emergently slaughtered or died of natural or other causes. In addition, Sweden has conducted random tests of "normally" slaughtered animals over 30 months of age. Other EU countries are required to test all slaughtered animals over 30 months. The affected cow showed symptoms of milk fever and was tested as an at-risk animal.

The European Commission will now reconsider the special derogation granted whereby Sweden was not required to test all bovine animals over 30 months of age intended for human consumption. A decision is expected in a few days. The Swedish government has announced that it expects to lose the exemption.

About 10,000 animals over 30 months of age have been tested annually under Sweden's current control program for BSE. Increased testing of all slaughtered animals over 30 months would mean additional testing of about 120,000-140,000 animals per year, a cost of about SEK 100 million (USD 12.5 million) borne by Swedish consumers.

No Consumer Reactions Expected

The fact that BSE has now reached Sweden will likely have very little effect on Swedish beef consumption. Swedish consumers have long been aware of mad cow disease and its connection to the human variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD). Nevertheless, Swedish imports of beef have more than doubled during the past ten years. Ireland is the major source of imported beef.

Media reports have been extensive but objective. The Swedish government has carefully stressed that this single case does not at all change the safety of eating beef. Sweden has broad measures in place to prevent the entry of BSE-infected material into the food chain, including the removal of specified risk material at slaughter.