



USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Report

Global Agriculture Information Network

Template Version 2.09

Voluntary Report - public distribution

Date: 7/7/2006

GAIN Report Number: UK6022

United Kingdom

Sanitary/Phytosanitary/Food Safety

UK scientific report questions EU position on beef hormones

2006

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Report Highlights:

Following a three and a half year study, independent scientific advisors in the UK have concluded that they are unable to support the conclusions of a 2002 report by the EU Scientific Committee on Veterinary measures relating to Public Health (SCVPH). The report by the SCVPH had concluded that the risks associated with the consumption of meat from hormone-treated cattle may be greater than previously thought. The SCVPH report is the basis for the EU's current assertion that it is meeting its WTO obligations on beef imports and its demand to the WTO that the U.S. and Canada lift their sanctions. However, according to the independent scientific advisors in the UK, the weight of evidence presently available does not support this conclusion.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
London [UK1]
[UK]

The Veterinary Products Committee (VPC) provides Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) Ministers with scientific advice on any aspect of veterinary medicinal products and specified feed additives.

According to the VPC in a report published on July 5, 2006, and contrary to the assertions of the EU's Scientific Committee on Veterinary measures relating to Public Health (SCVPH) in a 2002 report, the weight of evidence currently available suggests that likely levels of human exposure to hormonally-active substances in meat from treated animals would not be sufficient to induce any measurable physiological effect. The chairman of the VPC, David Skilton, said: "We believe our report is a thorough and balanced contribution to the scientific debate on the risks associated with the use of hormonal substances in food-producing animals".

Although the UK has always disagreed with the scientific evidence underpinning the EU ban it has always been fully implemented in the UK and this will continue. According to a VPC press release accompanying their publication of the report, as matters stand, there is no question of the EU or the UK Government authorizing hormonal substances for the purposes of growth promotion in food-producing animals.

The report was approved and recommended for publication at the VPC's May 2006 meeting. Two of the eleven VPC members did not approve all of the conclusions of the report, a fact picked up by the UK media earlier this week, just prior to the report's publication. However, the press coverage was limited and there has been no further press coverage post publication.

Copies of the VPC report, consultation responses and VPC commentary on the responses are available at:

www.vpc.gov.uk

Background

A previous VPC Working Group set up to examine this issue reported in October 1999 and then, as now, was unable to support the EU's position regarding the risks associated with the consumption of meat from hormone-treated cattle. The current VPC Working Group was set up in November 2002. Its purpose was to assess an Opinion of the EU's Scientific Committee on Veterinary measures relating to Public Health (SCVPH), published in April 2002 and other recent scientific evidence on the risks associated with the use of hormonal substances in farm animals. This SCVPH Opinion is available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/comm/food/fs/sc/scv/out50_en.pdf