



Mad Cow Disease Timeline

1986 Cattle in Britain begin to suffer from a condition similar to scrapie in sheep, nicknamed “mad cow disease,” due to the behavior of the sick cows. (Scientific name: Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, or BSE). Cause is unknown, though some suspect the feeding of rendered scrapie-infected sheep to cattle.

1988 421 cattle have been diagnosed with BSE in Britain.

1989 Britain bans human consumption of certain organ meats, including brain and spinal cord. US prohibits import of live cattle, sheep, bison, and goats from countries where BSE is known to exist in native cattle.

Early 1990s The British government insists the disease poses no threat to humans. An early advisory committee states that cattle would be a “dead end host.” Then house cats begin dying from beef byproducts in their pet food. Five types of antelope die in British zoos from TSEs that had been fed commercial cattle feed. Through all of this, the British government continues to adamantly insist that British beef is perfectly safe, and BSE is no threat to humans.

1993 120,000 cattle have been diagnosed with BSE in Britain.

Mid-1990s Britain bans the feeding of meat and bone meal to animals and its use as farm fertilizer, and begins tracking individual animals and testing any cow over 30 months old that is intended for human consumption.

May 1995 Stephen Churchill, 19, becomes the first victim of a new version of Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (vCJD). His is one of three vCJD deaths in 1995. ¹

March 1996 British Health Secretary announces to the British House of Commons that mad cow disease is “the most likely explanation at present” for “10 cases of CJD ... in people aged under 42.” (mad cow usa p. 183) This is the first time the British government admits BSE could be transmitted to humans in a variant form of CJD. After this point, 4.5 million cattle are destroyed.

Japan bans imports of meat-and-bone animal feed from Britain, while the EU announces a ban on British beef and beef products.

August 1996 Britain’s agriculture ministry confirms that mad cow disease can be passed from cow to calf.

British coroner rules that Peter Hall, a 20-year old vegetarian who died of vCJD, contracted it from eating beef burgers as a child. The verdict is the first to legally link a human death to mad cow disease.

Some estimates are that three British farmers per week are killing themselves.²

July 1997 21 vCJD victims in Britain have been confirmed, many more unconfirmed cases.

August 1997 The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) bans protein made from cows, sheep, deer, and other so-called ruminants in feed for other ruminants.

August 1999 Export ban on British beef is lifted after 3½ years.³

June 2000 Britain announces a cow born after measures were introduced to eradicate mad cow is found to have BSE.⁴

September 2001 First outbreak of BSE occurs in Japan.

April 2002 First confirmed case of vCJD appears in the US, in a 22-year-old British woman living in Florida.

August 2002 A Canadian man dies from vCJD, apparently after contracting the disease in Britain.⁵

May 2003 A bull in Canada tests positive for BSE, the first confirmed case of a cow born in North America.

December 23, 2003 A cow in Washington State tests positive for BSE.

December 30, 2003 US Department of Agriculture (USDA) bans sick and injured (“downer”) cattle from human food supply, as well as specified risk material and tissues, such as brain and spinal cord, from cattle over 30 months old and mechanically separated meat. A new system of animal identification is also to be implemented.⁶

January 26, 2004 FDA bans feeding cow blood, chicken waste, and restaurant scraps to cattle.⁷

January 2004 143 people in Britain have been infected with variant CJD, and 180,000 cattle have been diagnosed with BSE.

March 15, 2004 USDA announces it will test at least 268,000 cattle a year.

All information compiled from information in *Mad Cow USA*, Rampton and Stauber, 1997, except for the following:

¹ BBC News. "BSE Inquiry – The Final Stage: Chronology of Events."

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/special_report/1999/06/99/bse_inquiry/default.stm

² Rampton, Sheldon, and John Stauber. *Mad Cow U.S.A. – Could the Nightmare Happen Here?* Maine: Common Courage Press, p. 13.

³ Reuters. "The spread of mad cow disease," December 23, 2003.

www.cnn.com/2003/HEALTH/12/23/madcow.chronology.reut

⁴ Reuters.

⁵ Reuters.

⁶ US Department of Agriculture. "Veneman Announces Additional Protection Measures to Guard Against BSE," December 30, 2003. <http://www.usda.gov/Newsroom/0449.03.html>

⁷ US Department of HHS. "Expanded 'Mad Cow' Safeguards Announced to Strengthen Existing Firewalls Against BSE Transmission," January 26, 2004. <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~lrd/hhsbse3.html>