

**Consultation on changes to BSE Testing**

1. On 31 October 2008 the FSA, jointly with Defra and the devolved governments in all parts of the UK, consulted on the proposal to raise the minimum age for BSE testing of cattle slaughtered for human consumption and fallen cattle to 48 months. Having received Ministerial clearance for a shorter than normal consultation period, the consultation ended on 3 December to keep open the possibility of implementing the change from 1 January 2009.
2. The FSA was in contact with consumer representatives at the start of the consultation period, and took the opportunity at meetings with consumers during the period (Meat Hygiene Policy Forum, stakeholder workshop on official controls for over thirty month cattle and the Chief Executive's Consumer Stakeholder Forum), to ensure that the consultation had been brought to their attention and to hear any concerns.
3. Consultees were asked if they agreed that it would be acceptable to increase to 48 months the age above which cattle slaughtered for human consumption and fallen cattle must be tested for BSE. They were also asked to give reasons if they did not agree with the proposal.
4. In total there were 28 responses: 18 from industry representative groups (farmers' organisations and meat and rendering industry representatives); 1 from a meat plant; 2 from local authorities in Northern Ireland; and 7 from other bodies including Which? and Health Protection Scotland.
5. None of the responses objected to the proposal. All responses from industry representatives expressed support for the proposal, several stating they were strongly in favour and urging implementation without delay. The consumer and public health bodies who replied – Which? and Health Protection Scotland – also agreed that the change would be acceptable. No issues were raised that would place any obstacle in the way of implementation from 1 January 2009.
6. Comments received to the consultation (other than those indicating no comment or no particular views) are summarised in the table below.

**MICROBIOLOGICAL SAFETY & TSE DIVISION**

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### Summary of Responses

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Responses received from:

AIMS	National Beef Association (NBA)
Armagh City and District Council	National Farmers' Union (NFU)
Ballymena Borough Council	NFU Cymru
British Meat Processors Association (BMPA)	National Farmers Union Scotland (NFUS)
British Medical Association	Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission
British Veterinary Association (Scottish Branch) (BVAS)	Northern Ireland Meat Exporters Association (NIMEA)
Country Land and Business Association (CLA)	Oakdale Meats
Disability Action	Quality Meat Scotland [QMS]
EBLEX Ltd	Royal Association of British Dairy Farmers
Farmers' Union of Wales (FUW)	Scottish Association of Meat Wholesalers (SAMW)
Health Protection Scotland [HPS]	Trading Standards Institute
Hybu Cig Cymru – Meat Promotion Wales	Ulster Farmers Union (UFU)
Licensed Animal Slaughterers & Salvage Association (LASSA)	UK Renderers' Association (UKRA)
Livestock & Meat Commission (LMC)	Which?

TOTAL: 28

#### *General & Other comments*

From	Response
AIMS	Supports the abbreviated timetable to maintain a level playing field for our producers with other Member States. Sight of draft SIs would be appreciated. If TSE measures were subject to same scientific risk assessment as other public health measures, all SRM controls would be abolished and controls based on animal feed.  Retention of splitting and cord removal in sheep is completely indefensible.
BMPA	Heavily in favour of taking a risk and evidence based approach to decision making.
British Medical Association	Do not feel a response is necessary

<p>British Veterinary Association (Scottish Branch) (BVAS)</p>	<p>Not unreasonable that TSE testing costs are covered centrally rather than by farmers &amp; others, given that they are incurred for human health reasons, &amp; increasing the minimum age further would reduce this financial imbalance.</p> <p>Removal of risk material should continue until there is scientific evidence of little or no risk. Consideration should be given to its use rather than destruction. Divided veterinary opinion as to whether meat &amp; bone meal should be allowed to enter the ruminant food chain unless there is unequivocal evidence of zero risk: consideration should be given to its use for growing crops not fed to ruminants, or fertiliser for tree plantations/biofuel production.</p>
<p>Country Land and Business Association (CLA)</p>	<p>The evidence used to justify the increase to 48 months for BSE testing is also valid for showing that there is little public health benefit in VC removal for 30-48 month age cattle: BSE measures must be on basis of sound science, therefore strongly recommend re-visiting VC removal for 30-48 month cattle to avoid danger of additional category of cattle imposing cost and increasing probability of human error.</p> <p>Welcome the steady progress following the TSE Roadmap but wary that government may give lower priority to change that saves industry cost rather than government cost.</p>
<p>Farmers' Union of Wales (FUW)</p>	<p>Concerned FSA Board did not agree to raise the BSE test age until SEAC had reviewed a further report on BSE surveillance – believe FSA Board decision lacked scientific credibility. Query why FSA not satisfied with evidence provided on proposed increase in BSE test age supplied in correspondence with stakeholders in August and subsequent public meeting in September.</p>
<p>Livestock &amp; Meat Commission (LMC)</p>	<p>Encourage DARD/FSA to consider alternative approach of adopting a cut-off date, (i.e. where animals born after that date will not require to be tested). Believe that there is a low impact of testing age on risk to consumers and that continuing to test all cattle over 48 months of age will impose an unnecessary cost on industry with little benefit to consumers.</p> <p>Urge DARD/FSA to base decisions on scientific evidence of risk assessments and not on political expediency and undetermined perceptions of consumers; consider it DARD/FSA role to explain the science, evidence and proportionality of risk:benefit to consumers once decision made.</p>
<p>National Beef Association (NBA)</p>	<p>Would support move to increase the age at which SRM must be removed in line with BSE test increase, as soon as science allows.</p>

National Farmers' Union (NFU)	<p>The UK has demonstrated it meets the criteria for reduced BSE testing as laid out in the EU TSE roadmap. Recognises that consumer confidence and public health protection is vital; SRM controls key to protect public health will remain in place along with animal feed controls, key to protect animal health while testing of BSE suspects will continue. Always asked that decisions on TSEs to be risk based, proportionate and based in scientific evidence.</p> <p>Urge implementation on 01.01.09 – scientific evidence and risk assessment analysis supports this. There are clear economic and broader benefits to the meat industry, the taxpayer and the consumer.</p>
NFU Cymru	<p>Urges implementation from 01.01.09. Any delay would mean unnecessary cost and regulatory burden on farmers, processors and the taxpayer.</p>
National Farmers Union Scotland (NFUS)	<p>Concerned that from 1 January 2009 abattoir operators will be required to pay for BSE testing of bovines for human consumption, and that costs may be passed on to the producer. Concerned that free collection &amp; disposal of fallen stock for BSE surveillance will cease from 12 January, with an estimated cost to producers of £80-£120. Believes surveillance &amp; monitoring of disease that poses a risk to human health should be taxpayer funded.</p> <p>Would welcome a review of the current SRM rules, which may lead to removal of SRM in line with new testing regime to avoid 3-tier system.</p>
Oakdale Meats	<p>If there is agreement to raise the age at which BSE testing of cattle for human consumption is required, it is unfair to limit slaughter of 30 – 48 month old cattle to those abattoirs already approved to slaughter over 30 month (OTM) cattle. This will affect the ability of abattoirs not currently approved to slaughter OTM animals to compete in the marketplace.</p>
Quality Meat Scotland (QMS)	<p>Urges Scottish Government to act quickly to bring spinal cord removal requirements in line with BSE testing age thresholds.</p>
RABDF	<p>Urge that change is implemented as quickly as possible to avoid disadvantaging their members.</p>
Scottish Association of Meat Wholesalers (SAMW)	<p>Very important the proposal be implemented without delay, and must be in force by start of 2009. Age limits of 60 months could be justified in view of the very low and constantly reducing level of BSE in the UK, particularly in Scotland, the effective feed ban &amp; SRM removal, and the good record of BSE testing. EFSA &amp; VLA risk assessments appear to endorse this, but realises EU limiting increase to 48 months at this time. Essential this decision be reviewed in time to enable a further change to come into effect in summer 2010, by which time further data would have been gathered.</p> <p>Suggests immediate consideration be given to raising age for vertebral column removal to bring it back in line with the BSE testing age: the discrepancy causes significant production problems.</p>

Ulster Farmers Union	<p>To prevent NI industry being set at a competitive disadvantage, amendments to the age at which cattle, for human consumption, are required to be BSE tested should be implemented to the same timeframe in NI as that likely to occur in the Republic of Ireland,</p> <p>All abattoirs in NI should be allowed to slaughter cattle up to 48 months of age from the date the testing age changes, whether or not they were previously approved to slaughter OTM cattle. FSA should not create bureaucratic hurdles to prevent those establishments, currently not approved for OTM slaughter but capable of removing vertebral column from 30-48 month old cattle from slaughtering such animals.</p>
UK Renderers' Association (UKRA)	<p>Welcomes use of evidence-based risk assessment procedures for setting policy in this area. Would welcome the opportunity to contribute further as more detail is added to the proposals: details of testing can have implications for rendering plants in terms of expected throughput.</p>
Which?	<p>Essential that a precautionary approach continues to be adopted in relation to the BSE controls and that Specified Risk Material controls are effective. Conscious that there are proposals to try and reduce the burden SRM controls place on industry, therefore caution should be taken in relaxing enforcement in this area.</p>

***Do you agree that it would be acceptable to increase to 48 months the age above which cattle slaughtered for human consumption must be tested. If not, can you explain why.***

From	Response
AIMS	Approves without reservation.
Armagh City and District Council	Broadly supportive of the proposal to raise to 48 months the age above which all cattle require BSE testing with effect from 1 January 2009.
Ballymena Borough Council	Welcome the proposals which would be of great benefit to farmers and would hope that these are implemented as soon as possible.
British Meat Processors Association (BMPA)	Strongly believe that a move from 30 to 48 months should be pursued at the earliest opportunity. EFSA & VLA risk assessments concluded risk associated with an increase in the age limit is extremely low; underlined by SEAC advice that risk to human health was very small. Evidence suggests current testing limit is disproportionate and should not be allowed to continue.

British Veterinary Association (Scottish Branch) (BVAS)	<p>Agrees that age be increased in line with decrease in prevalence of BSE in cattle. Risk assessments indicate likelihood of BSE infected material entering human food extremely small, &amp; provided certain practices are maintained in meat plants there should be almost no risk to human or animal health.</p> <p>No objection to increasing age to 48 months, and there is opinion that this period could be longer as the number of cows born pre-1996 is greatly reduced: suggestion that a further extension be considered within a period of 2 years.</p>
CLA	Agree on grounds of evidence presented that it is acceptable to increase BSE test age to 48 months for cattle slaughtered for human consumption
EBLEX Ltd	Based on risk assessment and current prevalence, agree it would be acceptable to raise BSE testing age to 48 months (Indeed consider 60 months would be acceptable)
Farmers' Union of Wales (FUW)	Believe there is overwhelming scientific evidence supporting increasing the age to 48 months: Current 30 month testing limit places significant financial pressures on cattle industry while also having wider impacts such as pressure on grain supplies and increasing carbon footprint of agriculture. VLA Model provides overwhelming evidence that differences in food safety terms between 30 to 60 month test age ranges are negligible, highlighting infinitesimal nature of risk to human health even if meat from large numbers of BSE infected cattle were to enter food chain as SRM removal would ensure level of infectivity entering the food chain would be 12.5 million times lower than in 1993.
Health Protection Scotland (HPS)	Agrees that it would be acceptable to increase the age to 48 months, based on evidence provided in the consultation document.
Hybu Cig Cymru – Meat Promotion Wales	Agree it would be acceptable to raise the BSE test age to 48 months
Livestock & Meat Commission (LMC)	Considers that on the basis of evidence from EFSA and VLA that there is no reason why the age at which BSE testing is required should not be raised to 60 months. Reasonable conclusion based on VLA evidence would be that cessation of requirement to test healthy animals of any age would have very little impact on the risk to consumers.
National Beef Association (NBA)	Fully supports the risk based approach to increase the age limit for BSE testing. Strongly support move from 30 to 48 month BSE testing at earliest opportunity.

National Farmers' Union (NFU)	Strongly supports the move to increase the testing age. Fully recognises consumer confidence and public health protection is vital. Raising the age will have a significant impact on both producers and the taxpayer. Estimated number of tests will fall from 418,000 to 313,500. By increasing age, cost reduction will be approximately £1.1 million plus other associated savings. Imperative BSE testing age raised so primary producers benefit from savings.
NFU Cymru	Agree that it is acceptable to increase to 48 months the age above which cattle slaughtered for human consumption must be tested for BSE.  Increasing BSE test age will reduce the number of healthy slaughter cattle that require testing by around 25%, saving £1.1 million cost of BSE tests for over 100k slaughtered annually; significant proportion of extra costs would be passed to members – costs industry can ill afford.
National Farmers Union Scotland (NFUS)	Agrees it would be acceptable to increase the age to 48 months. Content with the advice from SEAC that the risks to human health are very small, based on EFSA & VLA risk assessments.  Would like to be assured that any potential negative consumer reaction has been overcome through the consultation process.
NIMEA	Agrees that it is acceptable to increase the age of testing animals from 30 to 48 months in all cases.
Quality Meat Scotland (QMS)	Agrees it would be acceptable to increase the age to 48 months. Will reduce costs among abattoir sector, but combined with SRM controls will create 3 streams of cattle and added logistic and administrative requirements within plants.
RABDF	Very supportive of intent to raise minimum age for BSE testing of cattle slaughtered for human consumption.
SAMW	Acceptable to increase age to 48 months.
Trading Standards Institute	Supports proposal to raise minimum age; accept scientific evidence that the risk is extremely low. Will be seen as an opportunity for return of meat from slower maturing native breeds which will give consumers more choice.  Important public confidence maintained, therefore essential robust enforcement measures included in future legislation.

Ulster Farmers Union	Whole heartedly endorse the proposal to raise BSE testing age to 48 months; have same view as EFSA and VLA analyses that raising the current age would be a logical step and a move to testing at 60 months could readily be justified. Can see no reason why authorities or consumers should have any concerns about adopting the revised EU monitoring programme in the UK.
UK Renderers' Association [UKRA]	No objections in principle to the proposal to increase the minimum age for BSE testing of cattle slaughtered for human consumption. Note the proposals are based on sound risk assessment procedures.
Which?	Recognise it is difficult to justify maintaining testing at 30 months in light of the modelling. Agrees it appropriate to change testing to 48 months.

***Do you agree that it would be acceptable to increase to 48 months the age above which fallen and other "Risk" cattle are tested for BSE? If not, can you explain why?***

<b>From</b>	<b>Response</b>
AIMS	Approves the subject matter of the consultation without reservation.
CLA	Having studied the evidence presented at EU and UK level, believes the proposed age increase to be entirely acceptable. The primacy of sound science should be the driving force behind these measures.
EBLEX Ltd	Agree that it would be acceptable to increase the BSE test age for fallen and 'risk' cattle to over 48 months, subject to the maintenance of testing all cattle suspected of being affected with BSE.
Farmers' Union of Wales (FUW)	Support increase on grounds that it is fully supported by scientific and statistical evidence. Decline in BSE incidences since 1993 means that level detected in fallen cattle is now effectively zero. Scientific and statistical evidence show that any changes in BSE prevalence would be picked up in emergency slaughter or post 48 month testing.
Health Protection Scotland (HPS)	Agrees that it would be acceptable to increase the age to 48 months, based on the evidence provided in the consultation document.
Hybu Cig Cymru – Meat Promotion Wales	Agree that it would be acceptable to increase the age above which fallen and 'risk' cattle are tested for BSE, subject to the maintenance of the existing provision for testing all cattle that are suspected of being affected with BSE.

Licensed Animal Slaughterers & Salvage Association (LASSA)	Producers must provide collectors with an accurate date of birth for all fallen bovines. The proposed raising of the testing age to 48 months will make it more difficult to determine the age by dental examination. If the collector is given an incorrect date of birth, any error must be the responsibility of the producer, not the collector as passports for fallen bovines are returned to BCMS and are not seen by the collector.
NBA	Fully supports the risk based approach to increase the age limit for BSE testing.
NFU	Strongly supports the move to increase the testing age to 48 months. Estimated number of tests will fall from 171,000 to 128,250. Increasing the age limit will offer savings to producers, who have to pay for the collection of these animals, and the taxpayer, who will not have to pay for testing.
NFUS	Agrees that it would be acceptable to increase the age to 48 months.
NIMEA	Agrees that it is acceptable to increase the age of testing animals from 30 to 48 months in all cases.
Quality Meat Scotland (QMS)	<p>Agrees it would be acceptable to increase the age to 48 months, bringing handling of fallen &amp; other "risk" cattle in line with food grade cattle. The science-based evidence is compelling.</p> <p>Concerned about cost of uplift of 24-28 month fallen stock and transfer of cost of collection &amp; transport of fallen cattle that require testing. Urges Scottish Government to work with National Fallen Stock Company to identify ways of reducing cost of fallen stock collection service across Scotland. Calls on Scottish Government to work with others to review legislation &amp; create opportunities to add value to products of rendering fallen stock and other animal by-products to reduce cost to primary producers of fallen stock collection.</p>
Royal Association of British Dairy Farmers	Very supportive of the intent of Defra, WAG and FSA to raise the minimum age for BSE testing fallen cattle to 48 months. Urge that this implemented for 1 January, otherwise their members will be severely disadvantaged.
SAMW	Acceptable to increase age to 48 months.
Trading Standards Institute	Believes that the proposal would be acceptable. However there could be some confusion when the free collection scheme ends, so it is essential that this information is communicated to all cattle keepers. Concern over a possible two-tier system for collection of fallen stock. Consideration should be given to measures to ensure that the prices for collecting fallen stock which does, and does not, require testing, should not be different. Also have concerns about possible delays in collecting fallen stock.
UKRA	Notes that the details of testing can have implications for rendering plants in terms of expected throughput.

Which?	Agree that it is appropriate to change the testing age to 48 months but, in accordance with SEAC's advice, it is essential that an effective surveillance system is put in place to effectively monitor any changes in BSE incidence.
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