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FOR INFORMATION

29 OCTOBER 2004

POSSIBLE FINDING OF BSE IN A FRENCH GOAT

Issue

1. An announcement was made on 27 October by the European Commission of a possible finding of BSE in a French goat.

Background

2. A research group in France, undertaking tests on randomly-sampled goats under the EU surveillance scheme, has found a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE) in a French goat that could indicate the presence of BSE.
3. In accordance with EU procedures, the finding has been submitted to the Community Reference Laboratory (CRL) at Weybridge for evaluation by an expert panel. This will take place over the next two weeks or so. They will come to a conclusion, in the light of the scientific evidence, about whether it indicates the presence of BSE in the goat.
4. Scrapie – a TSE in sheep and goats which is not considered to be transmissible to humans – has been in existence in the national flock for over 250 years. There is limited data on goats, but what research there is indicates that the behaviour of natural scrapie in goats is similar to that of scrapie in sheep. The FSA has publicly stated that there is a possibility of BSE in the sheep and goat population, given that these animals were in the past exposed to the same infected feed rations, and we know such animals can be artificially infected with BSE through experiments. BSE could in theory be masked by scrapie, though tests to differentiate between the two diseases in the UK have not to date found what we understand to be the BSE-like profile from over 2,300 diseased sheep tested.
5. Goats milk is used for human consumption and for the production of cheese. Whereas studies have shown no evidence of BSE in cows' milk, in sheep we know that the lymph nodes can carry BSE infectivity and lymphocytes are found in milk. Some experiments injecting milk from experimentally infected sheep and goats into mice have been done and not shown infectivity, but the data are limited. Goats milk is therefore subject to the same possible risk and uncertainty associated with BSE and sheep and goats.
6. The goat in question, slaughtered in 2002 in France, was tested at random for TSEs. Based on the initial positive finding of a TSE which differed from the normal scrapie strains, a two year mouse study was set in motion, the mice having been injected with infected material from the goat. If confirmed as BSE, this would be the first such finding in a sheep or goat. All 300 goats

in the same flock, with the one goat affected, were destroyed. Tests on all the other goats were carried out and found to be negative for TSEs. Thus, no product from a goat from this flock reached the food chain following the TSE finding.

Next steps

7. The CRL will advise the Commission about the significance of the findings and the need for any further work. The European Food Safety Authority EFSA will then be asked for comments, including a scientific risk assessment. Pending the CRL's report and any follow up EFSA Opinion, the Commission is not immediately proposing any further risk management measures beyond the extensive BSE controls legislation already in force, which includes a ban on certain body parts of all sheep and goats from entry into the food chain.
8. The Chairman of the UK BSE scientific advisory committee SEAC, Professor Chris Higgins, is being informed of these developments. European Chief Veterinary Officers are holding a regular meeting on 29 October and will take the opportunity to discuss the issue. The FSA will continue to monitor these developments closely.