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TSE 0059

To : Chief Port Health Authorities, Trading Standards and Environmental Health
Departments in Local Authorities in England

Copies: APA, APHA, CIEH, HPA, LACORS, LGA and TSI

Dear Colleague

Changes in BSE controls – over thirty months cattle

I am writing to inform you of the implications for local authority enforcement of a recent change in the BSE controls.

As you may be aware, the over thirty months (OTM) rule, which banned all meat from OTM cattle from the food supply, has recently been replaced (from 7 November 2005) with a robust system of BSE testing of cattle born on or after 1 August 1996. At the same time, the controls on imports of OTM beef were lifted. Cattle born or reared in the UK before August 1996 will remain permanently excluded from the food supply. These changes were implemented by The Bovine Products (Restriction on Placing on the Market) (England) Regulations 2005 (S.I. 2005/2719).

Over-age cattle at abattoirs

In order to reinforce the continuing ban on cattle born before August 1996, the consignment of such an animal to a fresh meat abattoir has been made an offence (under Regulation 10B of The TSE (England) Regulations 2002, as amended by the TSE (England) (Amendment) (No.2) Regulations 2005 (S.I. 2005/2633)). The responsibility for enforcement of the TSE Regulations outside licensed premises rests of course with the local authority.

The FSA Board is concerned that the ban on over-age cattle should be respected, both to avoid putting consumers at risk and to maintain public confidence in the BSE control measures being applied. The purpose of the new offence is to discourage farmers and livestock markets from sending over-age cattle for slaughter in the hope that they will not be intercepted by the controls in place at the abattoir. Nevertheless, since the change in the rules on 7 November, there have been several instances of over-age cattle being consigned to a fresh meat abattoir (although in each case prompt action by the abattoir operators and the Meat Hygiene Service prevented the animals from going through to the food supply). As a result, Defra has asked farmers' organisations to remind their members of their responsibilities and the MHS is being asked to maintain vigilance.

I am writing now to ask local authorities also to play their part in the effort to encourage compliance with this rule, by giving priority to investigating and, where appropriate, prosecuting any case of consignment of an over-age animal to an abattoir that is brought to their attention.

Checks on imported meat

As mentioned above, the changes introduced from 7 November 2005 include the lifting of the OTM controls on imported meat. There is therefore no longer any need for local authority checks on imported meat at meat premises to include checks on compliance with any restrictions as to age at slaughter.

Cattle identification checks

As also noted above, the previous complete ban on OTM cattle has been replaced by a requirement that all OTM cattle slaughtered for human consumption must receive a negative BSE test result before being released into the food supply. As with the OTM rule, the correct application and enforcement of the new testing requirement will depend on the cattle identification system to enable the age of animals at slaughter to be established. Careful checks on the identification of cattle entering abattoirs, including a cross-check on dentition, will therefore continue. Consequently, the change in the OTM rule is not likely to result in any change in the requirement for local authority enforcement of the cattle identification rules, which will remain important.

Guidance to Local Authorities

The Agency's guidance to local authorities on specified risk material (SRM) and other BSE controls will be updated next year to reflect these and other expected changes.

New consumer information publications

Finally, you may wish to be aware that, to accompany the change in the BSE controls, the Agency has issued updated information to consumers. The booklet, 'BSE & Beef: New Controls Explained', describes the new framework of BSE controls that apply to older cattle. A smaller leaflet, which summarises the changes and key information, is also available and has been offered to all major retailers and butchers' associations to make it available to their customers.

The booklet and leaflet can be downloaded from the links below. Copies may be obtained by contacting FSA Publications on 0845 606 0667 or emailing foodstandards@eclogistics.uk.com

Read the leaflet published by the FSA (pdf 136kb):

<http://www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/bsenewleaflet.pdf>

Read the booklet published by the FSA (pdf 427kb):

<http://www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/bsebooklet.pdf>



ALAN HARVEY