

## **BSE Testing**

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The USDA will expand the BSE, mad cow, testing and intends to examine 220,000 cows during the next 18 month period. The cost of the program will be \$70,000,000. About 35 million cattle are slaughtered each year in the US. Even with this large increase in the number of animals to be tested, many foreign countries are reluctant to ease the ban on US beef imports.

The majority of the animals to be tested will be considered to be highly likely to have BSE. These animals will have clinically apparent brain disorders, be unable to stand on their own or be deemed unfit for human consumption for other reason. Many of these animals will come from livestock presented for slaughter; however, tissue samples will also be collected by practicing veterinarians from animals that die on the farm. CDFA veterinarians will be collecting samples from animals sent to rendering plants as well. From this number of cattle, about 20,000 apparently healthy animals over 30 months of age will also be tested.

There will be laboratories in 12 states that will be doing the testing on the brains and spinal cords. These labs will use a rapid test for screening the samples. The anticipated turn-around time for diagnosis is less than 72 hours. Any samples thought to be BSE will be sent to the National Veterinary Service Laboratory (NVSL) in Ames, Iowa for confirmation. Final confirmation will require 4-8 days. The USDA expects that some samples will be BSE-suspects on the rapid tests; however, this does not necessarily mean that the animal has BSE.

There is some concern about how the results of testing will be handled as the delay between collecting the samples at the slaughterhouse and release of non-BSE carcasses may be a burden for high-volume plants. At this time, the USDA plans to have the results from the rapid-test labs sent to NVSL and then released to the slaughterhouses. Suspect carcasses must be held at the plant until released as BSE-free.

The bottom line is that the USDA will be testing many more cattle for BSE as suggested by the USDA panel of international experts. The cattle to be tested will come from animals that are highly suspect for BSE as well as animals that appear normal and healthy. While there may be little notice at the dairy, the slaughterhouses may have some initial difficulties due to delays in release of BSE tested carcasses. Renderers may also have some beginning pains as heads from dying animals will be collected from their facilities. Hopefully with this increase in testing, countries that import our US beef will again fully open their import doors.