

A suspected case of BSE in a goat slaughtered in France in 2002 has been confirmed today by a panel of European scientists: 17

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/food/biosafety/bse/crl_statement_tse_goats_28-01-05_en.pdf>

The European Commission proposes to step up testing to determine whether this is an isolated incident. Although this is the 1st time that BSE has been found in a goat under natural conditions, precautionary measures to protect consumers from this eventuality have been applied in the EU for several years. However, the level of TSE infection in goats seems to be extremely low, and any possible risk to consumers is minimal.

The European Commission asked the French authorities to submit their preliminary findings to the Community Reference Laboratory (CRL) for TSEs based in Weybridge, UK. TSEs are transmissible spongiform encephalopathies, namely BSE affecting cattle and scrapie affecting goats and sheep.

Markos Kyprianou, EU Commissioner responsible for Health and Consumer Protection, said "I want to reassure consumers that existing safety measures in the EU offer a very high level of protection. This case was discovered thanks to the EU testing system in place in France. The testing programme has shown us that there is a very low incidence rate of TSEs in goats and allowed us to detect suspect animals so that they can be taken out of the food chain, as was done with this goat and its entire herd. I am proposing to extend testing further to determine whether this is an isolated incident."

Existing safety measures

For many years, safety measures have been applied to all farmed ruminants (cattle, goats, sheep) to offer maximum public health protection in case BSE in goats was ever confirmed. These safety measures include the ban on feeding animal proteins in the form of meat-and-bone meal (MBM), the removal of specified risk materials (i.e. the removal of tissues such as brain, spinal cord, part of the intestines) from the food and feed chain, the slaughtering of herds affected by scrapie (a disease of goats and sheep similar to BSE but not infectious for humans), and a TSE monitoring and testing programme in all Member States. Over 140 000 goats have been tested since April 2002, including random testing of healthy animals, sick animals and those that die on the farm.

Extension of testing regime

Following this confirmation, the Commission is proposing increased testing for BSE among goats for at least 6 months (200 000 tests of healthy goats in the EU) to determine whether this is an isolated incident. The extent of the monitoring programme will be based on the goat population in each Member State and will focus primarily on Member States where BSE is present in the cattle population. All confirmed TSE cases will be subjected to a 3-step testing scheme already in use, which will make it possible to

differentiate between scrapie and BSE. These additional measures will be submitted for Member States approval at the next meeting of the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health scheduled on 2-3 Feb 2005. 1 7
Does this BSE case indicate a widespread problem?

The conditions that existed when the affected goat was born in 2000 no longer exist, and available evidence would suggest that even if the infection still exists in goats, the level would be extremely low. The feeding of meat-and-bone meal (MBM) to ruminants is generally considered to be the transmission route of BSE. In January 2001 the existing ban on feeding MBM to all ruminants was extended to a total ban on feeding MBM to all farmed animals. Goats in the EU generally only live for a few years, which means that the majority of goats in the EU today were born after the total feed ban was put in place. [This statement needs substantiation. Under optimal conditions, the lifespan of goats (and sheep) will significantly exceed 10 years. - Mod.AS]
Are goat milk, cheese and meat safe?

The European Food Safety Authority has advised that based on current scientific knowledge, goat milk and derived products are unlikely to present any risk of TSE contamination if the milk comes from healthy animals: <http://www.efsa.eu.int/science/biohaz/biohaz_documents/709/bdoc_statement_goatsmilk_en1.pdf>

Currently, as a precautionary measure and following scientific advice, milk and meat from goats affected by TSE cannot be used. These rules were in place before the case of BSE in a goat was discovered. As for cattle and sheep, specified risk materials (the tissues most likely to carry infectivity if the disease is present) are also removed from all goats even if there is no infection detected. While it is not possible to say that there is absolutely no risk, any potential risk will be mitigated by the safety measures put in place.

In light of the above, the European Commission advises no change in current consumption of goat milk, cheese and meat. The European Commission has asked EFSA to carry out a quantitative risk assessment for goat meat and goat meat products, which is expected to be ready by July 2005.

Background

Following the findings by a research group in France of a suspected BSE infection in a goat, the European Commission immediately made the findings public on 28 Oct 2004. The supporting data were submitted on 5 Nov 2005 [sic, should read 2004], as foreseen by the EU procedure, by the French authorities to the Community Reference Laboratory (CRL) for TSEs based in Weybridge (UK), for an evaluation by an expert panel. The CRL expert panel reported their findings today:

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/food/biosafety/bse/crl_statement_tse_goats_28-01-05_en.pdf>

The infected goat was born in March 2000 and slaughtered in France in October 2002. The results are only now becoming available, as the series of confirmatory tests included mouse bioassay (testing on mice), which takes 21 7 years to complete.

The goat and its herd were disposed of in accordance with EU rules and did not enter either the food or feed chain, and therefore do not represent a risk to public health. This goat was detected as part of the EU-wide surveillance programme designed to detect suspicious TSE strains in small ruminants, and was the only one in its herd of 300 goats to develop BSE. Over 140 000 goats have been tested across Europe since April 2002. [See comment].

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The TSE Community Reference Laboratory Expert Group On Strains:
Progress report on actions from the meeting on 25 Nov 2004

Report drafted by Marion Simmons and John Spiropoulos using data and analysis supplied by VLA Weybridge, IAH (NPU) Edinburgh, AFSSA and INRA. Executive summary [28 Jan 2005]

These investigations have been pursued by the transfer of materials from experimentally inoculated mice to the Veterinary Laboratories Agency and the Institute for Animal Health, for blind peer review. In addition, experimental caprine BSE was provided to AFSSA by the IAH for further western immunoblotting of the suspect sample alongside appropriate controls. Codes for mouse brain groups were held by a 3rd party (Professor Bostock) so that all examinations at the VLA and IAH were blinded. Results were reported to Professor Bostock, who broke the codes and reported the outcome to the VLA for compilation of this report. The report is therefore compiled by the VLA on behalf of the Expert Group, and has been agreed to by Professor Bruce (IAH).

A more comprehensive report of our findings has been provided to the French scientists who submitted the samples.

Conclusion

Our findings, and interpretation of the western immunoblotting work done at AFSSA, support the conclusion that the French caprine isolate (CH636) is likely to contain the BSE strain.

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[EU's TSE monitoring activities during the 1st semester of 2004 yielded the following data (the most recent available from the EU). 1 7

Sheep: 173 572 animals tested, 833 positive, 428 pending.

Goats: 17 294 tested, 47 positive, 52 pending.

The TSE-positive goats, as presented in the table, were detected in France (26), Greece (12) and Cyprus (8). (One case seems to be missing; see <http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/food/biosafety/bse/mthly_reps_scrapiegoats2004_en.htm>.

The total number of adult goats in EU's 25 member countries is about 9.5 million, compared with 66 million adult sheep. The leading goat-breeding countries are (millions of adult animals): Greece (3.9), Spain (2.33), France (1.03), Italy (0.82), Portugal (0.39), Cyprus (0.3) and Netherlands (0.2). All those countries are known to be scrapie-infected, and all except Cyprus are BSE-infected. Cyprus is regarded by the EU as GBR III, namely a country "where the presence of one or more cattle clinically or pre-clinically infected with the BSE agent is likely".

A significant increase in number of tested sheep and goats, and intensified efforts in differentiating scrapie from other TSE's -- especially BSE -- are essential. The possibility that BSE in small ruminants might, like scrapie be transmitted horizontally, deserves special investigative attention. - Mod.AS]

[see also:

CJD (new var.) - UK: update 2005 (01) 20050111.0095

TSE, goats - EU: 1st semester, 2004 20050119.0180
2004

BSE, goats - France 2002 (02): susp 20041119.3097

BSE, goats - France 2002 (03): susp 20041211.3279

BSE, goats - France 2002: susp. 20041030.2929

BSE, atypical - France: OIE 20040201.0391
2002

BSE, potential for emergence in sheep 20020106.3180

BSE, potential for emergence in sheep - EU (02) 20020624.4589

BSE, potential for emergence in sheep - EU 20020220.3596

BSE, potential for emergence in sheep - France 20020314.3742

BSE, potential for emergence in sheep: OIE 20020131.3444

BSE? Sheep - USA (Vermont) 20020412.3937
2001

BSE, sheep (model) - UK 20011129.2907

BSE, sheep - UK: contingency plan 20011001.2384

BSE, testing of sheep ongoing - UK 20011019.2574]

.....arn/pg/dk

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