Canada Strengthens Feed Controls

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency is banning cattle tissues capable of transmitting bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) from all animal feeds, pet foods and fertilizers. The enhancement will significantly accelerate Canada’s progress toward eradicating the disease from the national cattle herd by preventing more than 99% of any potential BSE infectivity from entering the Canadian feed system.

The banned tissues, which are collectively known as specified risk material (SRM), have been shown in infected cattle to contain concentrated levels of the BSE agent. Canada has already applied identical protection to the food supply, where SRM are removed from all cattle slaughtered for human consumption. This measure is internationally recognized as the most effective way to protect food from BSE.

“This ban tightens already strong, internationally recognized feed controls and shortens the path we must follow to move beyond BSE,” said the Honourable Chuck Strahl, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, “Preventing all these materials from entering the animal feed chain minimizes risks and demonstrates the commitment of Canada’s new government to take necessary, science-based actions to address BSE.”

Ongoing surveillance testing continues to indicate that the level of BSE in Canada is very low. This is attributable to Canada’s current feed ban, which has prohibited the use of SRM in feed for cattle and other ruminant animals since 1997. Extending SRM controls to all animal feeds addresses potential contamination that could occur during feed production, transportation, storage and use. Removing SRM from pet food and fertilizers is intended to mitigate the risk associated with the potential exposure of cattle and other susceptible animals to BSE through the misuse of these products.

The new outcome-based regulations enter into force on July 12, 2007, with additional time provided for small establishments to achieve full compliance. In the meantime, an awareness campaign will be undertaken to ensure that all regulated parties are fully aware of their responsibilities and have adjusted their practices and procedures as required. Special emphasis will be placed on working closely with small abattoirs to help them comply with the new requirements and facilitate their long-term viability. The Government has set aside $80 million to work with the provinces to assist industry’s implementation of the new feed controls.

Enhanced feed controls complete the Government’s response to the detection of BSE, consistent with the recommendations of the international team of experts that reviewed Canada’s situation. As a priority, Canada first focused on human health protection, which was achieved through the removal of SRM from the food system. Attention then turned to animal health measures through intensified surveillance testing for BSE and increased animal tracing capabilities.

The removal of SRM from the feed system, pet food and fertilizers involves a broad range of diverse stakeholders and considerations. In developing the required regulatory amendments, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency undertook analyses and broad consultations with industry, provinces and territories, the animal health community, trading partners and the public. This preparatory work was essential to ensure that an enhanced feed ban would be effective, enforceable, environmentally sustainable and economically feasible. Governments have identified and will continue to pursue alternative uses for SRM, such as processes that can generate biofuel.

SRM are defined as the skull, brain, trigeminal ganglia (nerves attached to the brain), eyes, tonsils, spinal cord and dorsal root ganglia (nerves attached to the spinal cord) of cattle aged 30 months or older and the distal ileum (portion of the small intestine) of cattle of all ages.
New Zealand Combating Foodborne Illness

**Banning fresh chicken ‘not the answer’**

The New Zealand Food Safety Authority was cited as saying that banning the sale of fresh chicken meat to lessen increasing food poisoning infections is not the answer.

The country’s poor food safety record was put under the spotlight in early July after a report by public health researchers said campylobacter rates from fresh chicken sold in supermarkets were skyrocketing.

The study from the University of Otago School of Medicine and Health was cited as saying that New Zealand had the world’s highest reported rates of campylobacter infection, which causes food poisoning.

Since the research was completed, rates have risen to a new high of 416 cases per 100,000 people for the 12 months ending May 2006, based on 15,553 cases notified during that period.

The study recommended a blanket ban on the sale of fresh chicken and suggested only frozen poultry be sold.

Lead study author Michael Baker urged two key approaches to reduce the harm from the campylobacter epidemic, stating, “First, we have to acknowledge that contaminated chicken is the major cause of this epidemic. A good start would be an open public dialogue between the poultry industry, regulators, scientists and consumer organisations about the scale of the problem and how to address it using proven methods. Second, we should immediately switch to frozen poultry and seriously consider banning the sale of fresh chicken for human consumption, unless it can be shown to have minimal contamination. Freezing chicken greatly reduces contamination levels.”

**The other side**

The New Zealand Food Safety Authority’s principal microbiologist Roger Cook was cited as telling National Radio it was too early to blame fresh chicken for the rise of infection cases, adding, “At the moment the Food Safety Authority are looking at the various options we have available, but science certainly wouldn’t tell us that freezing all chicken from this point onwards is a valid intervention.”

Dr. Cook was further cited as saying that the Authority and the Poultry Industry Association were looking at options other than a total ban on fresh chicken, adding, “One of the major ones being decontamination of poultry meat before it goes on sale – with chemicals that are quite safe, just variations of chlorine and sodium chloride.”

A ban on the sale of fresh chicken meat is not the answer to preventing outbreaks of campylobacteriosis, says food microbiologist Associate Professor John Brooks.

He says recent reports and subsequent debate over the comparatively high incidence of campylobacter outbreaks in New Zealand have been triggered by incomplete information.

“No clear mode of transmission has been established between chicken meat and humans. Campylobacter is also found in cattle and sheep, ducks and domestic pets, while water and dairy farm effluent have also been found frequently to be contaminated.”

Allowing only frozen chicken to be sold – as suggested by an Otago University researcher – will not eliminate the contamination, says Dr Brooks.

“Freezing does not destroy all the campylobacter, and so may not provide the hoped-for protection from food-borne illness,” he says. “The number of bacteria needed for infection to occur differs. For many types of bacteria this is in excess of 100,000 bacterial cells, but for campylobacter the infecting dose may be as low as six cells.”

He says there is also confusion about the contamination of chicken carcasses in the food processing chain. “Campylobacter cannot grow below about 30°C, which means it can’t grow during processing. The bacteria are found in the gut of animals and birds, so cross contamination during processing is the most likely route.”

Dr Brooks says poultry farmers and the industry generally have made strenuous attempts to eradicate campylobacter in chicken flocks – a difficult feat as campylobacter cells are also found in flies.

**Food safety at home is critical**

In the kitchen, thawing of frozen chicken can have its own hazards. The release of moisture can cause cross-contamination of surfaces and other foods.

Dr Brooks says that thorough cooking of chicken will destroy the campylobacter and that education must be a priority for the control of food poisoning.

“It is common for raw foods to contain pathogens, and the consumer must take some responsibility for controlling food poisoning by preventing cross-contamination in the kitchen and cooking raw foods properly.”

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**EU Commission proposes “upstream” measures to support poultry market**

The EU management committee for eggs and poultry approved a Commission proposal to allow the co-financing by the EU budget of measures to support the poultry market, because of the negative effects of the recent avian flu crisis.

The June 22nd proposal specifies the type of measures which can be financed up to 50 percent by the EU. It focuses on “upstream” measures, i.e. those which aim to temporarily reduce production, such as the destruction of hatching eggs. It sets a maximum level of compensation per unit destroyed, as well as the maximum number of units per Member State and the time period covered by each measure.

The Commission does not propose co-financing of “downstream” measures such as aid for private storage or the destruction of existing stocks of poultry meat. So far, 14 Member States have applied for EU support for their poultry sector. The expected cost to the EU budget of the measures proposed is between 650 and 656 million (€72-94 million CDN).

“The dramatic decline in poultry consumption and prices earlier this year was an extraordinary situation which required extraordinary measures,” commented Mariann Fischer Boel, Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development. “I believe our proposals will give farmers the flexibility to adjust their production to the market situation without prolonging market imbalances unnecessarily.”

At the height of the recent avian flu crisis, consumption of poultry and eggs fell dramatically in some Member States (30-70%) leading to a sharp reduction in prices. Previously, the regulations governing the egg and poultry markets allowed the EU to compensate only in cases where there was a case of avian flu on a farm or where farmers were prevented from moving their poultry because of restrictions imposed by veterinary orders. There was no possibility to provide EU aid on account of a fall in sales caused by a loss of consumer confidence.

Some of measures which can be covered are:
- the destruction or processing of hatching eggs
- the destruction of chicks (of chicken, guinea fowl, duck, turkey and goose)
- the extension of periods of temporary non-production beyond three weeks
- voluntary reduction in output by reduced placing of chicks

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Austria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia and Spain.

“Canada’s new government recognizes the importance of a strong and sustainable agricultural sector that creates long-term opportunities for Canada’s farm families. This Government believes in a robust agricultural sector — right across the entire value chain — and Canada’s supply management system is an integral part of that.” — The Honourable Chuck Strahl, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

With the first session of the 39th Parliament and the Senate both recessed for the summer, MPs went back to their ridings to focus on local issues and events. The second session of the 39th Parliament, also known as the fall session, will resume on Monday, September 18, 2006. The Senate will resume the following day.

Animal Cruelty Legislation

With the election call last fall, both the House Bill and the Senate Bill amending the Animal Cruelty provisions of the Criminal Code died on the order paper. However, in April, Senator Bryden re-introduced amendments to a new Bill, now entitled Bill S-213, (an Act to amend the Criminal Code – Cruelty to Animals). Essentially, the Bill would increase the penalties for animal cruelty but would otherwise leave the law unchanged. As the House and the Senate were recessing for the summer, Bill S-213 was just entering second reading.

CFC is reviewing the proposed legislation and will continue to monitor Bill S-213 as it moves through in the fall. However, given the current government determination to focus on their five priorities, it is not expected that the bill will be moving to the House of Commons for debate.

The House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

In mid-June, members of the SM-5, the UPA (Union des producteurs agricoles), CAFTA (Canadian Agri-Food Trade Alliance), and the Canadian Cattlemen’s Association appeared before the House of Commons Agriculture committee to present their positions prior to the ill-fated July WTO meetings in Geneva.

CFC’s Chairman, David Fuller, was one of the presenters on behalf of the SM-5 and responded to direct questions from committee members on the need to maintain Canada’s domestic system of supply management. He stated that what was needed at the WTO was a balanced deal for Canadian agriculture, one that would benefit both Canadian exporters as well as supply management.

At the end of June, the Federal, provincial and territorial ministers of agriculture met in St. John’s, Newfoundland and Labrador for their annual conference to discuss the future of agriculture and agri-food in Canada. The Federal Minister stated that all ministers expressed strong support for Canada’s active participation in the WTO negotiations and emphasized the importance of Canada’s efforts to achieve a more level international playing field for Canadian producers and processors. Provincial ministers reaffirmed their support for pressing for significant market access improvement for Canada’s exporters, as well as the right of producers to choose to use orderly marketing systems. In addition, provincial ministers from Canada’s Atlantic provinces attended the meeting called on the federal government to continue to defend Canada’s system of supply management at the WTO in Geneva. Several provincial ministers (7) said they planned to accompany Ministers Strahl and Emerson to the negotiations in Geneva.

At the Grassroots Level

CFC and its supply management partners have sent letters, copies of ads and key messages to MPs, MPPs and MLAs in support of several key trade issues. Most recently, the open letter to WTO negotiators that was signed by farmer organizations from 53 countries called on trade negotiators to “come to an agreement which protects the different food concerns of citizens around the world.”

Here is the letter:

An open letter to the negotiators of the WTO member states

The negotiators in WTO are fast approaching a deal on trade which will cause huge damage to the ability of poor countries to develop their agricultural sector and the ability of farmers worldwide to provide safe and sustainable production.

We, the undersigned, representing over 200 million farmers from 53 developed and developing countries in Africa, America, Asia and Europe, want an agreement in WTO but one which:

• gives developing countries with vulnerable agricultural sectors real opportunities to improve their situation
• recognises the right of countries throughout the world to develop their farming sector in a way which meets the concerns of their own citizens about food security and safety, as well as the environment, animal welfare and rural life.

The current trade talks in WTO are focused on a single objective — to promote more trade — and ignore these wider concerns.

We, the undersigned, representing over 200 million farmers worldwide, call upon the WTO negotiators to come to an agreement which protects the different food concerns of citizens around the world.

List of signatory countries:

Africa
Benin
Burkina Faso
DR Congo
Gambia
Guinea
Guinea-Bissau
Ivory Coast
Kenya
Mali
Niger
Rwanda
Senegal
Tanzania
Togo
Uganda

North America
Canada
Mexico
U.S.A.

Latin America
Bolivia
Nicaragua

Asia
India
Indonesia
Japan
Korea
Sri Lanka

Europe*
Iceland
Norway
Switzerland

*Also signing were the Committee of Professional Agricultural Organizations in the EU (COPA) and the General Confederation of Agricultural Cooperatives in the EU (COGEC) together representing over 100 farm organizations and 25 countries in Europe.
Doha Round at Crossroads

The end of July 2006 was supposed to mark the beginning of the last stage in WTO negotiations leading to the completion of the Doha Development Round by the end of the year. Modalities in agriculture and NAMA (non-agricultural market access) were to have been completed — the detailed agreements on how tariffs and subsidies would be cut, by how much and by when. Countries were to have settled their differences, prepared schedules of concessions and started drafting the final text of the multilateral agreement.

Negotiators, ministers, heads of state and other international organizations should have been jostling to get airtime on all major news channels to let people know how much better the world would become and how much better people’s lives would be after the completion of the Doha Round.

Nothing remotely close to that happened at the end of July.

Instead, multilateral WTO negotiations in all areas were suspended indefinitely. There were no cameras flashing, no gratuitous handshakes and no smiling politicians; just sober statements, finger pointing and headshaking.

How did it all fall apart?

The setup was not ideal, but seemed quite favourable. It all revolved around agriculture. At the end of June, trade and agriculture ministers met in Geneva. Nothing concrete resulted, but good discussions took place, views were exchanged and the waters were tested.

After about three days, the decision was made to send Pascal Lamy (WTO Director General) around the world to consult with key countries and determine their flexibilities. That “shuttle diplomacy” is what Lamy (WTO Director General) around the world to consult with key countries and determine their flexibilities. That “shuttle diplomacy” is what Lamy did the first two weeks in July and the expedition appeared to be successful. He gathered flexibilities from all major players, except for one: the United States.

Then the G8 Summit took place. On July 17th, the G8 leaders (Russia, U.S., Japan, Canada, Britain, France, Italy and Germany) were joined by other leaders from key countries (Brazil, Mexico, China, India, South Africa) and heads of various international institutions, including Lamy from the WTO. The major focus was trade and centred on their commitment to the Doha Round and the need to urgently complete the negotiations.

Politicians backed the negotiators... the momentum was there... but, what went wrong?

Agriculture once again the cause

Well... agriculture was again the problem. And objectively, the U.S. was not there yet. Lamy’s shuttle diplomacy revealed that all major players were eager to show flexibility in order to get the deal done. Japan was ready. The Europeans were ready (to offer more on the market access pillar). India was ready (to be more reasonable on special products demands). Australia and Brazil, two other major players, had been ready for a while.

It was only the U.S. that was not showing any flexibility... or, rather, was not satisfied with the flexibility being shown by the others. What all parties expected from the U.S. was that it agree to lower agriculture subsidies to $15 billion from $22 billion. But the U.S. would only accept to make that concession if they got more market access for their products; much more, even more than the flexibility the EU had already shown (which had already been accepted as enough by developing countries led by Brazil and India).

Finally, at a meeting between the EU, U.S., Australia, Brazil, India and Japan (the G-6) at the ministerial level on Sunday July 23rd, all cards were put on the table and it became clear that the U.S. wanted out of the game. The negotiations collapsed.

Lamy convened a Trade Negotiations Committee (all WTO members) on July 24th and officially announced that negotiations in all areas were suspended indefinitely, until he feels countries are ready again to sit down and negotiate. The WTO General Council (highest WTO decision making body, after the ministerial conference) meeting on July 28th upheld Lamy’s proposal. Thus, the famous “end of July deadline” came and went without success, and the possibility of completing the Doha Round by December seems highly unlikely.

What’s next?

First of all, the Round is clearly being delayed – yet again. One of the reasons for setting all these deadlines to occur this year (April, June, July, September and December) was the expiration, in July 2007, of the Trade Promotion Authority (TPA) the U.S. Congress granted the U.S. President in 2002.

Under that Act, the U.S. President can negotiate trade deals and submit the final agreement for approval to the Congress, which can either accept it or reject it, but cannot amend it. It is a process meant to help the administration fast-track trade deals. The last time a U.S. President had this authority was in 1994, during the completion of the previous round of WTO negotiations (the Uruguay Round). Between 1994 and 2002, the President had no such authority.

It is clear now that whether or not members resume negotiations in the fall and even if they do so in a hurry, there just isn’t enough time to have the final deal in place by December, a mere six months before the TPA expires and the legal date by which President Bush has to submit a trade deal to Congress.

Based on this fact, there are two possible scenarios at this point in time. The short-term scenario is that negotiations resume this fall, the midterm elections in the U.S. (in November) produce a Congress that extends the TPA, a final deal is struck early next year, and by the end of 2007 countries ratify it and it starts being implemented in January 2008.

The long-term scenario is that negotiations remain frozen, the U.S. President does not get his TPA renewed, which means that nothing moves until a new President is elected in 2008, WTO negotiations resume in 2009 with high chances that they would start from scratch, and no agreement is reached earlier than 2010. The Round would probably lose its name (Doha) and possibly even its aim (focus on development).

Between these two extremes anything is possible. By the end of the year it should be clear which of the two scenarios is likely to materialize.