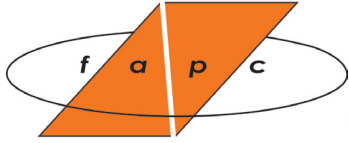


# Food and Agricultural Products Center



## FLASH!!

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY™

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## Consumer Confidence in Beef Expected to Rebound

STILLWATER, Okla. – A national poll conducted by *CNN/USA Today/Gallup* regarding Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy found that one in six Americans expressed concern that they or their families could become victims of the disease. This was almost the same number who said they cut back or stopped eating meat out of concern about the disease.

Currently, only 6 percent of Americans think the BSE situation is a crisis while 28 percent consider it to be a major problem. Furthermore, 17 percent of those surveyed said they were cutting back on meat, while 81 percent said it made no difference on their consumption habits.

Though this last study found many Americans had not changed their consumption habits, a survey by the Harvard School of Public Health showed 16 percent of the respondents said they or a family member have stopped ordering beef at restaurants and 14 percent stopped buying beef at supermarkets.

Major beef producers like Tyson are still reporting higher quarterly earnings for the past three months. Sales rose to \$6.5 billion despite concerns over BSE.

Ron DeHaven, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's chief veterinarian said American consumers should feel assured that appropriate safeguards are in place to protect the public health.

The USDA has enhanced regulations to prevent BSE from entering the food supply, said Dave Moe, pilot plant manager for the Oklahoma Food and Agricultural Products Research and Technology Center.

“Carcasses from cattle intended for human food that are sampled and submitted to the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service for BSE testing will be held until the sample is determined to be free for BSE,” Moe said. “The USDA will not allow any non-ambulatory disabled cattle to be slaughtered for human food.”

Moe also said specified risk material, or SRM, from cattle 30 months of age or older are prohibited in the human food supply. SRMs include skull, brain, trigeminal ganglia, eyes, vertebral column, spinal cord and small intestine. Tonsils are considered SRMs for all cattle.

USDA expanded a prior prohibition on spinal cord from being allowed in product produced from advanced meat recovery systems to also prohibit other SRM material close to the vertebral column. Advanced meat recovery systems are systems that remove meat from bone and keep bone intact through the process.

Air injection stunning has been prohibited to ensure that SRMs from the heat do not transfer to other surfaces. Other humane stunning methods are typically used for beef.

Jake Nelson, meats processing manager for the Center, said new feed restrictions also are in place per the Food and Drug Administration.

These measures taken by the USDA are critical to combating a BSE crisis in the United States. U.S. beef consumptions will depend on how consumers perceive the scope of the problem and how the government responds.

“The USDA’s quick response after the first positive test sample for BSE in the United States has increased consumer confidence in the U.S. beef supply as well as the government’s ability to take action to strengthen protections against BSE,” Moe said.

Awareness among consumers of BSE was at 96 percent following the discovery, compared with 61 percent last September. Nevertheless, confidence remained strong, going from 88 percent in September to 89 percent in January, according to a study by the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association.

To further back the assertion that consumer confidence in beef is returning, the Food Policy Institute conducted a survey that found nearly 68 percent said their confidence in the beef supply remains unchanged. Eight percent said their confidence had actually increased

and 22 percent said their confidence has decreased although not much. Seven percent said their confidence had decreased a great deal, while 15 percent said their confidence had fallen some or a little.

All of these studies show that consumer confidence in the beef industry was shaken but is beginning to rebound and will fully recover by this summer.

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Dave Moe is a pilot plant manager at the Food and Agricultural Products Center. He may be contacted at (405) 744-6071 or [moe@okstate.edu](mailto:moe@okstate.edu). Jake Nelson is a meats processing manager at the Food and Agricultural Products Center. He may be contacted at (405) 744-6071 or [nelsojl@okstate.edu](mailto:nelsojl@okstate.edu).

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