



Canadian Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) in 2003: Recent Successes and Lessons Learned



On May 20th, 2003, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) announced a cow from northern Alberta was found to have BSE. This detection led to the United States immediately closing its border to Canadian beef and cattle, along with forty other countries. Countless lobbying efforts, trade negotiations, and court rulings followed over the next few years as the CFIA and the Canadian dairy and beef cattle industries worked to fully re-open trade and reduce imposed animal health management through surveillance, risk mitigation and BSE eradication measures. In May 2021, Canada obtained its negligible risk status for BSE from the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE).

Key Successes & Lessons Learned

The Market Access Secretariat (MAS) within Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) is an example of an entity that was constructed out of the BSE crisis. The MAS is a coordinated effort to address international barriers to agricultural trade and can share information to allow international partners to advocate on behalf of Canadian products, if needed.

In terms of regaining access to foreign markets, a key factor in achieving success is the relationships developed with key decision makers, which extends well beyond the scientific community. Canada was the first country in the world to have beef consumption increase after the detection of BSE (stated by CFIA). This can be attributed to the confidence animal and human health officials instilled with consumers

during the early days of the announcement. The Beef Value Chain Round Table morphed into the communication network between industry and government during the BSE crisis and met at least weekly, and sometimes daily, to provide two-way communication. Going forward, the Canadian Cattlemen's Association (CCA) will continue to work collaboratively with Global Affairs Canada and AAFC to continue to remove remaining BSE-related market access barriers.

Looking Forward

In times of disasters, there is cohesion and willingness of all industry stakeholders to work towards a common goal. The personal tragedies related to BSE are endless and mental health was considered a key challenge during this crisis. A key lesson learned is that mental health needs to be more deliberately built into the response and recovery. A robust purpose-built mental health response system must be available for all stakeholders (industry and government). Early crisis classification is critical. Government(s) can be hesitant to proclaim an emergency animal health event as a disaster, as this has wide-ranging compensation implications. Yet, doing what is right, without political intervention is critical. Proclaiming a disaster allows measures to be taken that otherwise would not be available to governments.