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POLICY IN CONFIDENCE

TO: Dr Ailsa Wight
Mr Lister

FROM: Dr J S Metters

DATE: 12 August 1993

CC: Dr McGovern
Dr G Jones

CJD AND FARMERS

1. The article in the Daily Mail of 12 August again raises the question of a causative link between BSE and CJD. This follows the death of a second farmer from CJD. The article is fortunately written in moderate terms, and hopefully will not generate too much anxiety.
2. However, the second annual report to Parliament from the National CJD Surveillance Unit identified only 48 "Definite or Probable Case of CJD in the UK in the Year May 1992 - April 1993". It appears only one of these was a farmer, who died in September 1992. The second farmer, died in July 1993 and will feature in these statistics for this year.
3. I know that the Tyrrell Committee considered the information about the second case at their July meeting. I also recognise the problems of identifying suitable denominators. I am, however, concerned about how DH and MAFF would respond to public concern generated if there are further CJD cases among farmers. If the total number of CJD cases in 1993-1994 is the same as last year, the current incidents of farmers would be two out of a hundred. Random distribution could account for this, but the public perception would be very different if the incidents of farmers rises to 1 in 33, and at 1 in 25 CJD cases. I doubt the public will continue to believe this is random variation alone.
4. Unwelcome, though it maybe to the Tyrrell Committee, I think they must be asked at their next meeting to give further thought to what they might advise the Department and MAFF if another farmer (or two) develops CJD. Or, if a butcher or abattoir worker develops the disease.
5. Although the Committee were given plenty of advance warning about the second farmer, they may not be so fortunate next time round. Some contingency planning on the Committee's response to a further case of CJD in a farmer seems essential. At the same time the Committee should consider if there are special risks to farmers, for example their historical habit of chewing cattle nuts, that might be implicated.
6. Happy to discuss.



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