

DIS 829

5

IN CONFIDENCE

BSE : REMOVAL FROM FOOD CHAIN OF CERTAIN OFFALS FROM CULL COWS

As agreed I am seeking your clearance on a revised draft note to the Parliamentary Secretary (Mr Thompson). The re-draft takes on board comments received on the draft circulated under cover of my minute of 27 April.

A J Lawrence

A J LAWRENCE
Animal Health Division
9 May 1989

Mr Meldrum + 1

cc

Mr K Baker

Mr C Cockbill - is the reference to lymph nodes correct?

Mr R Bradley

Mr J R Cowan (BEF)

Mr M Griffiths (MH)

Mr Lowson

*Thank you for a chance to comment.
I think there is some danger of confusing
the proposed legislation on baby food and a
widespread on brain, spinal cord etc.
I am a little uneasy about some of the assumptions
made because I am advised that some bovine
brain is used for human consumption*

*Mr Lawrence
cc Mr Crawford
Mr Baker
Mr Lowson.*

14/5/89

6

*I have tried to reflect the LVS
Comments in the note which went
out 29.5.89/1.1-1.2*

*in need
products
but not*

BSE

1. The Parliamentary Secretary (Mr Thompson) has sought advice on removing the brains and certain other offals of cull cows (those at the end of their working life) from the human food chain (your minute of 18 April refers).

BACKGROUND

Offals with potential for carrying the agent

2. If the agent were to be present in cull animals with pre-clinical BSE it is most likely to be in the brain, spinal cord, spleen, lymph nodes and intestines. The thymus would not be a problem in cull animals because it atrophies and disappears in the adult animal. Neither would lymph nodes which are not used for human consumption. *However the agent would be present in such animals would be at a lower level than that found in animals suffering from the disease*
 Current Position under the Meat Products Regulations

3. Brain, spinal cord, spleen and intestines are prohibited from use in uncooked meat products. They can be used as ingredients in cooked meat products. However, the ingredients list need only refer to the generic title "offal".

Offal sold in butchers shops

4. Brain, spinal cord, intestines (tripe) or any other offal sold in a butchers shop would need to be sold under its individual name.

Consultations with BMMA

5. The Association has circulated a questionnaire amongst its members (which cover about 80% plus of the volume of meat products sold in the UK). Although a written response

DIS 829

is still awaited they have informed us informally that brain, spleen, spinal cord and thymus (which might be available from young animals) are not used in meat products. Some intestines are used for sausage casings but the mucosal surface, including lymphatic tissue (which might harbour the agent) is removed before use and they are salted as well. *Such materials, therefore, must be considered as very low risk unless.*
 Southwood

6. Paragraph 5.3.5 of the Report considered that if BSE were to be present in the animal it is most likely to be in the spleen and lymphatic tissue in the early stages of infection and, as the disease progresses, in the brain and neural tissues. The Report goes on to say that it has been suggested that although clinically affected cattle are being slaughtered and destroyed, consideration be given to products containing brains and spleen being so labelled, to enable the consumer to make an informed choice. Their conclusion on this was that the risks as at present perceived would not justify this measure.

7. We have acted on all the recommendations made by Southwood, and in relation to baby foods gone further by preparing legislation which will prohibit the use of all offals in baby foods, even though it is currently not used.

CONSIDERATION

8. Since the meat products industry has indicated that brain, spinal cord, spleen and thymus are not used in the preparation of meat products, a prohibition on the use of these offals would not cause any problems. ^{to the state} Neither would the prohibition on the sale of these offals in butchers shops be of any great significance since cull cows (from which it is proposed to prohibit the use of offals) form a small proportion of the total market.

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9. Against this, unless any new information about BSE emerges from the various research projects being undertaken, there would not appear to be any reason to take any further action at this stage, particularly since Southwood did not recommend it. To do so would probably invite criticism as to why it was not taken earlier. It is also possible that it will arouse public concern, even if we make the point that it is very much a precautionary measure. ^{It is possible that the public may conclude that there is some reason to be concerned and that it is very much a precautionary measure.} This may focus on the consumption of bovine products generally, including offals from non-cull cattle which would not be affected by the ban. Criticism may also come from those who might wonder why it was deemed necessary to take action so soon after the publication of an independent report of experts, which had looked into this subject, with a particular remit to consider any human health implications, and whose recommendations had been accepted and implemented. It would also imply that the Southwood Working Party had not done its job properly ^{or has suppressed some important information.}

10. Before any action were taken it would also be logical to seek the views of Sir Richard Southwood. The Department of Health would also need to be consulted. This may open up the door for further debate about scrapie and why similar measures are not being taken in relation to sheep ^{and goats} as well. The general public may also latch onto this aspect.

Community And Other Trade Implications

11. Any such action would need to be explained to the Community and may raise alarms about our exports to other Member States which are covered by Community trade rules. ^{In addition there could be implications for third country trade.} We would also have to consider very carefully the implications for imports. For example, should we prohibit imports of the offals we are banning here. Although it is only Ireland which has identified BSE there may be other countries (USA?) which possibly have the disease but have yet to record it ^{or where it is present in a substantial form}

copy for [unclear]

It is not a new product if sold fresh and used as such

CONCLUSION

12. It would seem that action to prohibit the use of certain offals as uncooked or cooked meat products, either by statute or through a voluntary agreement with the meat trade, would have little impact on the industry. Even so, the Parliamentary Secretary will wish to consider whether action should be taken in the light of the fact that Southwood did not make such a recommendation and would need to be consulted about it, as would DoH; the prospect that, rather than reassure, it might alarm the public and re-open questions about the consumption of beef in general and, indeed, sheep meat and offal as well. The trade implications would also need to be considered very carefully.

13. The Parliamentary Secretary may wish to discuss this with officials when he has considered this note.

A J LAWRENCE
Animal Health Division
8 May 1989

Miss Bowles - PS/Parliamentary Secretary (Mr Thompson)