



# Setting the PACE

► by *Susan Rhode*, director of communications and public relations

## It's time to brush up on BSE

*Unless you've been hiding under a rock for the past few months, you know that BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) is back. And this time, it has reared its ugly head in North America. A case of BSE, often referred by the media as mad cow disease, was found in Canada this past May. The culprit — the carcass of a 6-year-old cow rendered in a Canadian packing plant in January.*

### The response

Government officials on both sides of the border quickly took the bull by the horns. Herds in Canada were quarantined and tested, and the paper trail of the cow and her carcass was quickly mapped. The cow originated from Alberta, Canada. Other animals in the herds traced to have a connection to the infected cow tested negative for BSE.

Countries that once had open trade with Canada for both live cattle and beef products shut down their borders. In a matter of hours, one case of BSE became a global trade and food safety monster.

Back in the States, the announcement couldn't have come at a worse time — just days before Memorial Day weekend, the "official" kickoff of grilling season. But, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) held the news media at bay. And other international events grabbed the headlines.

The short-term effect on consumer confidence and attitudes seems to be minimal at this point, largely because of the proactive approach both the USDA and the NCBA took on the issue.

As I write this column, testing and tracking continues. However, the biggest issue seems to



be when, and if, trade barriers will be lifted and under which new set of rules.

### Basic facts

Keep watching beef industry publications and online news sources for the latest updates on this issue. In the meantime, here are a few of the basic facts surrounding the Canadian BSE case and the United States' efforts to keep BSE out of this country.

- BSE does not exist here, and there has never been a confirmed case in the United States.
- The USDA has stopped trade with Canada until further investigation, complying with existing BSE regulations.
- The United States has an aggressive triple-fire-wall system that has prevented the introduction and spread of BSE in the United States.
- The United States has employed an import ban on live animals and beef from any country that has known cases of BSE since 1989.
- In 1990 the United States began a surveillance program focusing on animals with the highest risk of

neurological disease. The United States was the first country to institute a surveillance program without having the disease within its borders.

- BSE is not contagious. It does not spread from animal to animal. Rather, it is believed to spread through contaminated meat-and-bone meal. The feeding of meat-and-bone meal was banned in the United States in 1997.
- A multi-year risk analysis conducted by Harvard University in 2001 concluded: "Our analysis finds that the U.S. is highly resistant to any introduction of BSE or a similar disease. BSE is extremely unlikely to become established in the U.S."
- BSE affects cattle older than 36 months of age. The Canadian cow that was identified was 6 years old. This cow did not go into the food supply.
- BSE is found in the central nervous system (CNS) tissue, such as the spinal cord and brain, and is not found in the meat.
- All cattle that have entered the United States from Canada are identified. The USDA is determining appropriate actions.

For more detailed information on BSE, go to [www.bseinfo.org](http://www.bseinfo.org). If you have questions, concerns or need other sources of information, please contact me at (816) 383-5100 or [srhode@angus.org](mailto:srhode@angus.org).

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### Consumer communications tip ...

When a consumer asks you why packages of ground beef are bright red on the outside and dull, grayish-brown on the inside, tell them not to be concerned. The red color of beef and other red meats is largely due to the presence of a natural pigment called myoglobin.

When the surface of ground beef or a beef cut is exposed to air, the oxygen in the air combines with the myoglobin to form oxymyoglobin, which is bright red in color. This color change does not mean the meat is not fresh or edible. This is simply a natural, scientific result when meat is exposed to oxygen.

**The Last WORD...**  
**The happiest people don't necessarily have the best of everything, they just make the best of everything.**

— *Unknown*