

# Harvard Study Shows Very Low Risk Of BSE In U.S.

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The USDA released a landmark study by Harvard University that shows the risk of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) occurring in the United States is extremely low.

The report showed that early protection systems put into place by the USDA and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) have been largely responsible for keeping BSE out of the U.S. and would prevent it from spreading if it ever did enter the country. Even so, officials outlined a series of actions to be taken that would continue strengthening programs to reduce that risk even further.

The risk assessment was commissioned by USDA and conducted by the Harvard Center for Risk Analysis. It evaluates the ways BSE could spread if it were to ever enter the United States. The report's purpose is to give agencies a scientific analysis to evaluate preventative measures already in place and identify additional actions that should be taken to minimize the risk of BSE.

"The study clearly shows that the years of early actions taken by the federal government to

safeguard consumers have helped keep BSE from entering the United States," said Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman. "Even if BSE were to ever be introduced, it would be contained according to the study. However, we cannot let down our guard or reduce our vigilance. We must continue to strengthen these critical programs and today we are announcing a series of actions to bolster our protection systems."

"Based on three years of thorough study, we are firmly confident that BSE will not become an animal or public health problem in America," said Dr. George Gray, deputy director of the Harvard Center for Risk Analysis and director of the project.

In response to the report, Veneman announced a series of actions the USDA would take, in cooperation with HHS, to strengthen its BSE prevention programs and maintain the government's vigilance against the disease.

First, USDA will have the risk assessment peer reviewed by a team of outside experts to ensure its scientific integrity.

Second, the USDA will more than double the number of BSE

tests it will conduct this fiscal year, with over 12,500 cattle samples targeted in 2002—up from 5,000 during 2001.

Third, USDA will publish a policy options paper outlining additional regulatory actions that may be taken to reduce the potential risk of exposure and ensure potential infectious materials remain out of the U.S. food supply. To ensure its decisions are science-based, options will be tested using the computer model developed through the risk assessment to determine the potential impact they would have on animal and public health.

The options to be considered will include: prohibiting the use

of brain and spinal cord from specified categories of animals in human food; prohibiting the use of central nervous system tissue in boneless beef products, including meat from advanced meat recovery (AMR) systems; and prohibiting the use of vertebral column from certain categories of cattle, including downed animals, in the production of meat from advanced meat recovery systems. USDA will invite public comment on the options and then proceed with appropriate regulatory actions.

Fourth, USDA will issue a proposed rule to prohibit the use of certain stunning devices used to immobilize cattle during slaughter.

Fifth, USDA will publish an Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPR) to consider additional regulatory options for the disposal of dead stock on farms and ranches. Such cattle are considered an important potential pathway for the spread of BSE in the animal chain.

"We found that even if BSE were ever introduced, it would not become established," said Gray. "With the government programs already in place, even accounting for imperfect compliance, the disease in the cattle herd would quickly die out, and the potential for people to be exposed to infected cattle parts that could transmit the disease is very low."

## DEP Secretary Appoints New Northwest Regional Director

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — DEP Secretary David E. Hess has announced the appointment of Kelly Burch to serve as the director of DEP's Northwest Regional Office.

The northwest region encompasses Butler, Clarion, Crawford, Elk, Erie, Forest, Jefferson, Lawrence, McKean, Mercer, Venango and Warren counties.

"Kelly has skillfully represented Pennsylvania at a national and international level in his work on Great Lakes issues," Hess said. "I believe that experience plus his prior work with the department makes him an excellent choice for the post of regional director."

As regional director, Burch will manage more than 200 DEP employees in the 12 counties of northwestern Pennsylvania.

Since 1995, Burch has been chief of the Office of the Great Lakes, managing Pennsylvania's involvement in Great Lakes programs. His responsibilities included representing the Commonwealth on the International Joint Commission's (IJC) Great Lakes Water Quality Board, the Binational Executive Committee, and the Lake Erie Lakewide Management Plan.

On the state level, he served as the remedial action plan coordinator to the Presque Isle Bay Public Advisory Committee that is developing a strategy to address environmental concerns in the bay identified by IJC as an Area of Concern in the Great Lakes. In addition, he represented the Commonwealth at meetings of the Council of Great

Lakes Governors and the Great Lakes Protection Fund.

Prior to his appointment to the Office of the Great Lakes, Burch served three years as DEP Great Lakes coordinator and since 1986 was a geologist at the DEP Northwest Regional Office in Meadville in the Oil and Gas Management Program.


Burch replaces Steven Beckman, who accepted a job as an attorney in private practice in August, and James Rozakis, assistant regional director, who filled in as regional director on an interim basis.

Burch holds a bachelor's degree in geology from Edinboro University. He resides in Erie County with his wife and two children.

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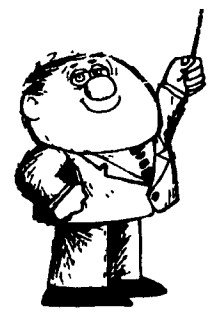


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