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"Mad" Cows, Or "Mad" People ?

By: Hesh Goldstein

Reading the articles appearing in The Honolulu Advertiser, on December 31, 2003, concerning the "mad cow" issue, I can see very clearly that the crux of the problem is money, not the health of the people. Ann Veneman, the Secretary of the U.S. department of Agriculture, stated that changes would be imminent to protect the consumer, despite the fact that what Veneman is proposing now was advised to be followed in 1996 by the World Health Organization. Also, in the same article, Daniel Puzo, a spokesman for the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service said, "the USDA would not release the names of 42 distributors that sold the recalled meat, on advice from attorney's that such information could harm the businesses".

Let's put this issue in its proper perspective. The National Cattlemen's Beef Association describes government and industry efforts to safeguard the American public from mad cow disease as "swift", "decisive" and "aggressive". [1] Ann Veneman adds "diligent", [2] "vigilant" and "strong". [3] The world's authority on these diseases disagrees.

Dr. Stanley Prusiner is the scientist who won the Nobel Prize in Medicine for his discovery of prions, the infectious agents thought to cause bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), or mad cow disease. The word Dr. Prusiner uses to describe the efforts of the U.S. government and the cattle industry is "terrible". [4] What are these "stringent protective measures" [5] that the Cattlemen's Association is talking about, and how do they compare to global standards and internationally recognized guidelines?

In 1996, in response to the revelation that young people in Britain were dying from variant Creutzfeldt Jakob Disease (vCJD), the human equivalent of mad cow disease, the World Health Organization (WHO) issued seven "Recommendations". Numbers 5-7 were observations and/or recommendations for further research. The first four recommendations, however, were concrete proscriptions to reduce the likelihood of mad cow disease spreading to human populations. [6] To this day, the United States government continues to violate each and every one of these four guidelines.

- #1. Stop Feeding Infected Animals To Other Animals**
- #2. All Countries Need To Establish Adequate Testing And Surveillance**
- #3. Stop Feeding Cow Brains, Eyes, Spinal Cords Or Intestines To People Or Livestock**
- #4. Stop Weaning Calves On Cow's Blood**

So, since 1996, the World Health Organization has recommended that all countries stop feeding prion infected animals to other animals, yet the U.S. government continues to allow deer infected with chronic wasting disease to be rendered into animal feed, [7] and the industry continues to oppose any proposed change in the law. [8]

Since 1996, the World Health Organization has recommended that all countries test their downer cattle for mad cow disease, yet the U.S. government continues to test but a tiny fraction of this high risk population. The beef industry calls U.S. surveillance "aggressive" and doesn't think more testing is necessary. [9] The world's authority on these diseases just calls it "appalling". [10]

Since 1996, the World Health Organizations has recommended that all countries remove beef products containing organs like spinal cord from the human food supply. The U.S. government continues to refuse to implement such a measure, and the industry continues to oppose it, referring to such products as nothing but "wholesome". [11]

Since 1996, the World Health Organization has recommended that all countries stop feeding risky cattle organs like brains to all livestock. The U.S government is considering it. The American Meat Institute and 14 other industry groups remain vocally opposed. [12]

And, since 1996, the World Health Organizations has recommended that all countries stop feeding any remains of cows to cows, yet the U.S. government still allows dairy farmers to feed calves gallons worth of cow blood and fat collected at the slaughterhouse. [13] Industry representatives continue to actively support this practice. [14]

In 2002, the USDA requested feedback on a number of options for further preventive measures, including a total ban on allowing the brains and spinal cords from downer cattle in the human food supply. [15] The spokesperson for the American Meat Institute explained that the meatpacking industry would take a "significant hit" financially if the USDA enacted such a proposal. [16]

The American Meat Institute explained that spinal cords pose no health risk, "because the U.S. is BSE-free". [17] Despite grossly inadequate surveillance for the disease, when asked if we have BSE in U.S. cattle, The American Meat Institute, in 2002, emphatically replied, "No, BSE is a foreign animal disease". They stressed that, "The fact that we share no physical borders with any affected nations has been a key means of protecting our cattle". [18]

Now that mad cow disease has been discovered in North America, the USDA should immediately enact measures to prevent human exposure by issuing an emergency interim rule to ban products that may contain the agent that causes mad cow disease. [19] So far, though, according to an agency spokesperson, the USDA isn't even discussing plans to increase testing for the disease. [20]

Years ago, once mad cow disease started appearing in Europe, Davis Byrne, the European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection, immediately called for a comprehensive Europe-wide surveillance program to test every cow slaughtered for human consumption over a certain age. Commenting on the program he said, "One of the major lessons I have learned in dealing with BSE is that political establishment must be fully transparent with the public on the issue. There must be no hidden agendas. No distortions. No false assurances. Transparency, information and open dialogue must guide our actions". [21] The United States could learn from Europe's experience.

My thanks to Dr. Michael Greger for the efforts he put forth to compile this information.

So, people of Hawaii, what do you think? You have been lied to and deceived by the "mad" people who supply you with the "food" you are addicted to. Why do they lie and deceive and stay in denial about the reality of the situation? For more profit and more profit only! How does that make you feel knowing that you have been used and your health compromised solely for more and more money?

Hesh Goldstein is the moderator of "Health Talk", a live call-in talk show airing on K-108 radio (1080 on the AM dial) on Saturday morning from 8:05 AM to 9:00 AM.

2. **USDA release No. 0166.03 20 May 2003**
3. **USDA release No. 001203 15 January 2003**
4. **Mad Cow Disease in Canada. May 23, 2003 9:00 am KQED Forum hosted by Angie Coiro**
5. **National Cattlemen's Beef Association. FMD and BSE: What Every Producer Should Know. April 2001**
6. **World Health Organization Consultation on Public Health Issues Related To Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy and the Emergence of a New Variant of Creutzfeldt Jacob Disease. MMWR 45(14); 295-6, 303. 12 April 1996**
7. **Guidance for Industry: Use of Material from Deer and Elk in Animal Feed. 14 May 2003**
8. **American Feed Industry Organization Feedgram. 30 April 2002**
9. **"Critics say U.S. needs to do more to protect against mad cow". The Journal News (New York) 29 may 2003**
10. **Mad Cow Disease in Canada. May 23, 2003 9:00am KQED Forum hosted by Angie Coiro**
11. **Referring to mechanically separated meat | American Meat Institute Fact Sheet. Meat Derived by Advanced Meat Recovery. October 2002**
12. **"FDA changes in feed restriction won't reduce BSE risk, industry groups say". By Dan Murphy on 1/15/03 for www.meatingplace.com**
13. **Based on average 7.9 week weaning period [USDA Dairy Herd Management Practices Focusing on Preweaned Heifers N129.0793. July 1993**
14. **Testimony of Richard Sellers, Vice President for Feed Control & Nutrition, American Feed Industry Association before the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Consumer Affairs. 4 April 2001 Washington, DC>**
15. **USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service. Current Thinking on Measures that Could Potentially Contain the Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy Agent. 15 January 2002**
16. **U.S. Meat Groups Oppose BSE Rules. January 21, 2002 Farms.com**
17. **American Meat Institute Fact Sheet. Meat Derived by Advanced Meat Recovery. October 2002**
18. **AMI Fact Sheet Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy. November 2002**
19. **USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service. Current Thinking on Measures that Could be Implemented to Minimize Human Exposure to Materials that Could Potentially Contain the Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy Agent. 15 January 2002**
20. **The Journal News (New York) 29 may 2003**
21. **European Commission press release IP/00/ 1289. Brussels, 13 November 2000.**