

This is a provisional English translation of an excerpt from the original full report.

Risk Assessment Report

Cattle meat and offal imported from Sweden to Japan (Prions)

Food Safety Commission of Japan (FSCJ)
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ABSTRACT

The FSCJ conducted a bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) risk assessment of cattle meat and offal imported from Sweden in response to a request by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW). Referring to a list of published scientific literature as well as documents submitted by the MHLW, the FSCJ discussed and evaluated BSE risks to human health regarding the import of cattle meat and offal from Sweden, in the case that the age restriction on cattle meat and offal imported from Sweden is changed from the current 30 months of age to no age restriction, in line with the international standard for mitigating BSE risks.

The number of cases of classical BSE worldwide has been decreasing, and few cases have been reported in recent years. Consequently, “risks related to the prevalence of BSE prion in living cattle” decreased significantly and contributed relatively little to BSE risk overall. In addition, the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) Terrestrial Animal Health Code does not stipulate any age restriction for trading cattle meat and offal. Given these, the FSCJ investigated terms of import of cattle meat and offal from Sweden and studied whether the cases of variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (vCJD) associated with consumption of classical BSE prions through intake of beef and offal (excluding SRMs) could be extremely low under no age restriction. The outcome will depend on appropriate risk control measures for meat processing such as removal of Specified Risk Material (SRM) or ante-mortem inspection even after the age limit is removed. The FSCJ comprehensively evaluated whether inspection and risk control measures were appropriately implemented in Sweden.

The results of the risk assessment are summarized below.

Classical BSE has not been identified in cattle born in Sweden to date. Accordingly, it is deemed that the risk control measures in Sweden effectively reduce the spread of classical BSE. The FSCJ presumes that the incidence of classical BSE will be quite unlikely if those measures are maintained at the current level.

According to the data on prion accumulation in the classical BSE-transmitted cattle and epidemiological information on vCJD cases, only a small amount of abnormal prion protein (PrP^{Sc}) is detected in tissues except SRM. In brief, considering appropriate inspection at slaughter will be able to eliminate cattle with

clinical symptoms, it is presumed that the potential intake of PrP^{Sc} through food is extremely low if SRM is removed.

Thereby, the FSCJ judged that the appropriate control measures at slaughtering and meat processing are taken in Sweden. Taking into account the interspecies barrier between human and bovine¹ in addition to appropriate risk control measures, the FSCJ considers the possibility of vCJD occurring in association with consumption of classical BSE prions would be extremely low after allowing import of cattle meat and offal over 30 months of age at the time of slaughter from Sweden.

Furthermore, the FSCJ conducted a risk assessment in August 2016 regarding atypical BSE countermeasures applied to domestic cattle². It concluded that the possibility of prion disease, including vCJD derived from atypical BSE prion through intake of cattle meat and offal (excluding SRMs) would be extremely low as long as the appropriate risk control measures could be taken, similar to a classical BSE disease. There are no new findings affecting this view.

Given the above, the FSCJ concluded that BSE risks to human health would be negligible upon permitting the import of cattle meat and offal (excluding SRMs) over 30 months of age at the time of slaughter from Sweden.

Note

The FSCJ drew this conclusion of the assessment assuming that current risk control measures are continuously implemented. Therefore, risk management organizations should continuously collect information, particularly relating to the country's feed regulation, surveillance, inspection at slaughter and SRM removal regulation.

¹ See “Cattle meat and offal imported from the U.S.A., Canada and Ireland to Japan”, January 2019
https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/foodsafetyfscj/8/3/8_D-20-00019/_article/-char/en

² See “Consideration of risk variations in Japan derived from proposed revision of the current countermeasures against BSE”, August 2016
<http://www.fsc.go.jp/fsciis/attachedFile/download?retrievalId=kya20151218480&fileId=203>