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

Risk Assessment Report

Meat and offal of cattle, sheep and goats imported from Finland to Japan

(Prions)

Food Safety Commission of Japan (FSCJ)
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ABSTRACT

The FSCJ was requested by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) to conduct a risk assessment of meat and offal of cattle, sheep, and goats imported from Finland. Referring to publicly available documents as well as materials submitted by the MHLW regarding the bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) situation in the said country, the FSCJ assessed the risk of BSE agent in meat and offal of cattle, sheep and goats imported from Finland in relation to such border measures as age restriction of import and definition of Specific Risk Materials (SRMs).

[1] Meat and offal of cattle
The risks in the case that <A> the age restriction shall be changed from the current "all ages restricted" to "no age restricted"; and that <B> SRM scope shall be changed from the current "all tissues from cattle of all ages (all import banned)" to "tonsils and distal ileum (limited to the portion 2 meters from the caecum connection) from all cattle, head (excluding tongue, cheek meat, skin and tonsils), spinal cord and vertebral column from cattle over 30 months of age". Such SRMs should be removed at the time of import.

[2] Meat and offal of sheep and goats
The risk in the case that SRM scope shall be changed from the current "all tissues from sheep and goats of all ages (all import banned)" to "head (including tonsils but excluding tongue, cheek meat and skin) and spinal cord from sheep and goats over 12 months of age; and spleen and distal ileum from all sheep and goats". Such SRMs should be removed at the time of import.

[1] Meat and offal of cattle
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 has become a smaller portion of the overall BSE risk. In OIE's Terrestrial Animal Health Code, there is no age restriction for trading meat and other products of cattle. Given these, the FSCJ investigated terms of import of meat and offal of cattle from Finland, and studied whether the cases of a variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (vCJD) which is associated with consumption of classical BSE prions through intake of beef and offal (excluding SRMs), could be extremely low under the above-

mentioned two cases (<A> and <B>). The outcome will depend on appropriate risk control measures for meat processing such as removal of Specified Risk Material (SRM) or ante-mortem inspection. The FSCJ comprehensively evaluated whether inspection and risk control measures were appropriately implemented in Finland.

The results of the risk assessment are summarized below.

Classical BSE has not been identified in Finland in domestic cattle born since 1995. Accordingly, it is deemed that the risk control measures in Finland are effective to reduce the spread of classical BSE. The FSCJ presumes that the incidence of classical BSE will be quite unlikely as long as those measures are maintained at the current level.

According to the data of prion distribution 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 subtle if SRM is removed. Thereby, the FSCJ judges that the appropriate control measures at slaughtering and meat processing are taken in Finland.

Taking into account the interspecies barrier between human and bovine[1] in addition to appropriate risk control measures, FSCJ considers the possibility to occur vCJD in association with consumption of classical BSE prions would be extremely low under the above two border measures. Furthermore, the FSCJ conducted a risk assessment in August 2016 regarding atypical BSE countermeasures applied to domestic cattle[2]. 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 risks to human health would be negligible under the above-mentioned two cases (<A> and <B>) for import of cattle meat and offal from Finland.

[2] Meat and offal of sheep and goats

[1] See “Cattle Meat and Offal Imported from the United States of America, 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

Classical BSE has not been identified in Finland in sheep and goats. In the light of the source and route of BSE transmission, the FSCJ considers that feed regulation, surveillance, and other factors are extremely important risk control measures for sheep and goats in the same way as cattle, and presumes that the possibility of classical BSE occurring would be extremely low as long as the current measures are maintained.

Considering the findings obtained comprehensively, based on the same concept of "Revised countermeasures against BSE in sheep and goats January 2016" as well as the interspecies barrier between human and bovine, the FSCJ judges the possibility to occur a vCJD in association with consumption of classical BSE prions would be extremely low under the measure below:
permitting import of SRM removed meat and offal of sheep and goats from Finland, while changing SRM scope from the current "all tissues from sheep and goats of all ages (all import banned)" to "head (including tonsils but excluding tongue, cheek meat and skin) and spinal cord from sheep and goats over 12 months of age; and spleen and distal ileum from all sheep and goats."

Given the above, the FSCJ determined that the adverse effects on human health could be negligible under the above SRM conditional import permission.

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.