

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy or Mad Cow Disease

CAUSE: Mad Cow Disease is caused by the consumption of feed contamination with the infective agent. The causative agent is believed to be a prion, or an abnormal protein. A few cases have been found in the US and Canada.

EFFECT: Mad Cow Disease, or Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), causes deterioration of the brain and eventual death. Affected animals show changes in temperament, lack of coordination, decreased milk production, decreased body weight, and, ultimately, death.

How is BSE spread? BSE is spread by the consumption of nervous tissue from infected animals. Currently, there is no evidence that BSE can be spread by contact between animals. However, there is some evidence that cows may pass the infection to their calves in utero.

How can BSE be prevented? Do not feed prohibited meat, bone meal, or other ruminant-derived byproducts to cattle. The ruminant to ruminant feeding ban is the best defense against acquiring and spreading this disease.

Can BSE affect people? A variant form of Creutzfeldt-Jakob's Disease has been linked with the BSE outbreak in Great Britain and Europe.

What if there is an outbreak? If a case is identified, the USDA will investigate and trace all related animals and animals potentially fed contaminated feed. Potentially affected animals will be slaughtered. The ramifications of losing export markets is costly for all producers, not just those who happen to have affected animals.

For more information on Mad Cow Disease, see:

[USDA APHIS: Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy – An Overview](#) (PDF)

[The Merck Veterinary Manual – Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy](#)

[The Mad Cow That Stole Christmas](#)

[Trade Effects of BSE](#)