



28th June 2005

PRESS RELEASE

EFSA provides further assessment on health risks of goat meat and goat meat products with regard to BSE

Following the suspected case of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) in a goat in France, which was subsequently confirmed¹, the European Commission requested that EFSA carry out a quantitative risk assessment on the risks posed to humans from goat meat and goat meat products. In a statement published on 28 January 2005², the Scientific Panel on Biological Hazards (BIOHAZ) of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) indicated that important information gaps remained related to the quantification of risks to human health associated with consumption of goat meat should BSE be present in the goat population. In its opinion published today, the BIOHAZ Panel concludes that the likely prevalence of BSE in the wider EU goat population is very low, based on results of ongoing and also recently increased surveillance of the goat population put in place by the European Commission³ and on other data available to date. Owing to a lack of appropriate data required to quantify the risk of BSE in goats, EFSA's BIOHAZ Panel carried out a qualitative risk assessment. The Panel concluded that "the current risk in terms of BSE, related to the consumption of goat meat and goat meat products, is considered at this time to be small for goats born in 2001 after the feed ban and later". Such advice could be reviewed in the future pending availability of further surveillance and experimental data.

The BIOHAZ Panel based its assessment on the following points:

- The European Commission and Member States have so far carried out over 93,000 tests on goats since the first case was identified and none have been found positive for BSE⁴.
- BSE has been found in only one goat (in France) and none of the other goats in the herd concerned had the disease. A second suspected case from another herd in the UK is undergoing additional laboratory tests for BSE and these results will be completed in 2 years' time

¹ <http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/05/105&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=fr>

² Statement on the assessment of safety with respect to the consumption of goat meat and goat meat products in relation to BSE/TSE http://www.efsa.eu.int/science/biohaz/biohaz_documents/787_en.html

³ <http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/05/132&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=fr>

⁴ The European Commission stepped up its surveillance of the goat population following the detection of the first case in France last year. This involved increased and discriminatory testing to distinguish between BSE and scrapie (a form of Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy which is not transmissible to humans) for all positive scrapie cases.

- The only goat confirmed as having the disease was born before the 2001 feed ban on Meat and Bone Meal (MBM). MBM is thought to be the most likely route of BSE infection to cattle. Since the 2001 ban, very few goats, if any, would have had access to MBM.
- The UK goat population was traditionally fed with MBM before it was banned in the EU and, with the exception of a case of Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy (TSE) still to be confirmed, there is no evidence of any goat having BSE in the UK
- Specified Risk Materials (SRM)⁵, such as brain and spinal cord, have been and continue to be removed from all goats over the age of 12 months since 2001. This risk management measure eliminates those parts of the animal which would be the most highly infectious, if an animal were to have BSE. Current SRM measures for goats do not however reduce the risk to the same extent as for cattle in the case of an infected animal.

EFSA's BIOHAZ Panel further concluded that given the paucity of data, it would be necessary to carry out experimental research in order to assess the infectivity and development of BSE in goats. Depending on availability of funding, this research could take up to 3-4 years to complete. In addition, the Panel recommended that the European Commission conduct increased surveillance of the goat population with respect to BSE and in collaboration with Member States for a further 6 months in order to confirm the initial results obtained thus far with regard to BSE prevalence.

Should another case or cases be found, EFSA might then have to re-evaluate its risk assessment scenarios for BSE in goats without delay. The occurrence of a further case could have an impact on safety related to the consumption of both goat meat and goat meat products and, ultimately, on human health.

Various risk scenarios were considered by the Panel. If experimental data on BSE in goats were to confirm that, as for scrapie, the infectious agent is distributed in the goat in many of its tissues, and if the surveillance indicates in future that BSE prevalence in the goat population is higher than presently considered, then there could be a potential for a considerable adverse impact on public health.

The full text of the opinion is available on the EFSA website at:
http://www.efsa.eu.int/science/biohaz/biohaz_opinions/990_en.html

For media enquiries, please contact:

Alun Jones, Press Officer
Tel: + 32 2 337 2487
E-mail: Alun.Jones@efsa.eu.int

or

Anne-Laure Gassin, EFSA Communications Director
Tel : + 32 2 337 2248
GSM: + 32 478 330 19 68
E-mail: Anne-Laure.Gassin@efsa.eu.int

For more background information about the European Food Safety Authority, go to:
<http://www.efsa.eu.int>

⁵ According to EU rules, the following SRMs; brain, spinal cord, skull, eyes, tonsils, must be removed from goats over 12 months old. The spleen and ileum should be removed from all goats.

Notes for editors:

1: Although the European Commission asked EFSA to look into BSE for both goats and sheep, EFSA decided to address the issue of BSE in goats for the present time as this was the species in which a case had been found under natural conditions and in order to simplify the task at hand. This does not exclude EFSA's undertaking a further risk assessment of BSE in sheep at a later stage.

2: A goat in the UK was also suspected of having BSE. Material from this goat has been sent for laboratory tests involving a mouse bioassay which may take up to 2 years to complete.

3: Concerning goat milk and goat milk products, EFSA's BIOHAZ panel concluded in January 2005 that in light of current scientific knowledge, goat milk and milk products sourced from healthy animals, and irrespective of their geographical origin, are unlikely to present any risk of TSE (or BSE) infection at this time. Experts recommended that the common practice of excluding animals with mastitis (inflammation of the udder) as sources of milk continue to be emphasised as it provides further assurance of the removal of any potential infection including TSE. EFSA's scientific advice remains unchanged on this issue.

For EFSA statement, please go to: http://www.efsa.eu.int/press_room/press_release/713_en.html
Statement of the Scientific Expert Working Group on BSE/TSE of the EFSA's BIOHAZ Panel on the safety of goat milk and derived products with respect to possible risks from BSE/TSE (Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy) published on 26 November 2004 at
http://www.efsa.eu.int/science/biohaz/biohaz_documents/709_en.html.