

USDA Answers Your Questions

PRODUCER: What is USDA's Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) Testing Program?

USDA: It is a one-time effort that will provide a snapshot of our cattle population to help determine whether BSE is present in the United States.

The goal is to test as many cattle from the targeted high-risk population as possible in 12 to 18 months. Samples will be taken from slaughter facilities, rendering plants, livestock auctions, veterinary clinics, public health laboratories, and farms and ranches.

PRODUCER: What are targeted high-risk cattle?

USDA: Experience in Europe has shown that testing high-risk cattle is the method most likely to identify BSE if it is present. Generally, these are adult animals that have some type of clinical abnormality that could be consistent with BSE. This includes cattle that are dead, down, or disoriented.

PRODUCER: How will the testing be done?

USDA: USDA personnel will collect brain samples and send them to an existing network of state and federal laboratories approved to conduct rapid-testing for BSE. If a sample tests inconclusive there, confirmatory testing will be done by the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) at the National Veterinary Services Laboratories (NVSL).



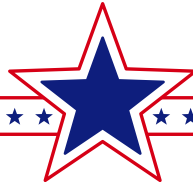
NVSL will test each sample using immunohistochemistry (IHC), which is recognized internationally as the gold standard for BSE testing, and/or Western blot when applicable.

PRODUCER: What happens if one of my cows tests positive?

USDA: The cattle owner will be compensated for any cattle taken as a result of the traceback/traceforward investigations. Any quarantine of affected animals would be temporary, and losses due to the investigation will be reimbursed.

PRODUCER: What are the goals of the BSE Testing Program?

USDA: The goals are to obtain enough samples from the targeted population to help us determine whether BSE is present in the United States and, if so, help determine at what level. This information will help us determine if additional animal or public-health control measures need to be implemented. This information will also help reassure our trading partners about the animal health status of the U.S. cattle populations.



PRODUCER: Why does USDA need my help?

USDA: While most of the samples will come from off-farm sources, for the program to be statistically sound, some samples will have to come directly from producers. This is especially true in states that do not have disposal facilities, such as rendering or salvage slaughter facilities.

PRODUCER: What can I do to help?

USDA: If you have a dead, down, or disoriented cow, call the toll-free BSE hotline right away at 1-866-536-7593.

The costs involved with sampling the

animal, such as disposal costs, will be covered by USDA.

PRODUCER: Why should I care about the BSE Testing Program?

USDA: Doing the right thing isn't always easy, but it's still the right thing. If BSE is found and dealt with on someone else's operation, you would benefit from the increased reputation of America's vigilance against this disease. And, even though the scientists who are running the testing program hope they don't find another case of BSE, being able to reassure our customers and our trading partners is very important.

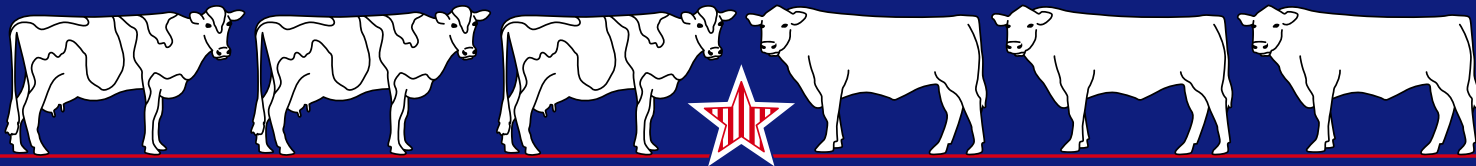
PRODUCER: Where can I learn more about the BSE Testing Program?

USDA: More information is available online at: <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/lpa/issues/bse/bse.html>



Help Protect America's Herd





(Protecting America's Herd, continued from front cover)

that the most scientifically reliable way to chase down any possible trace of BSE is to test older cattle that fall into those three categories.

The success of the testing program depends, in part, on producers calling the toll-free number to report those animals so they can be tested. That number is 1-866-536-7593. The costs involved with sampling the animal will be covered by USDA.

USDA understands that reassuring consumers, reassuring our trading partners, and protecting America's herd are vitally important.

"We must all participate for this program to be effective," said Wavrin.

At the edge of the Yakima Valley, the deep green of the irrigated fields suddenly gives way to the browns and tans of the sagebrush that covers the slopes of the surrounding hills.

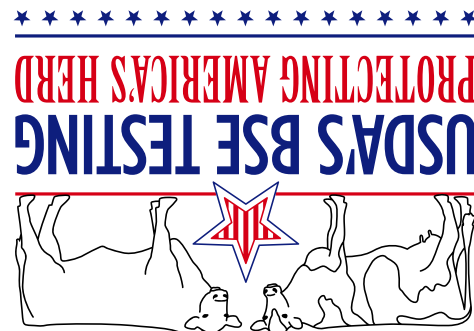


On the Wavrin farm, the schedule has returned to the normal

long hours. Meanwhile, USDA scientists are counting on producers to make the calls that will help protect America's herd.



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