

Forewarning of the BSE Crisis Was Insufficient

Industry involvement in 2003

Of the 177 farms that responded to the survey, 90% were involved in the beef or dairy industry in 2003 when the first case of BSE was identified in Alberta. By 2008 when the survey was done this had dropped to 83%, and others reported they expected to get out of farming/ranching altogether.

Prior Warning about BSE Coming to Canada – “I was blindsided by the whole thing”

The majority of farms were unprepared for BSE. Only 25% of participants reported that they had any prior warning that finding a case in Canadian cattle was possible. Among these 25%, most learned from the media and deduced that if it could happen in Britain, it could happen here. Three participants reported learning through a government source (2 from agricultural department staff and 1 from a government letter).



Not surprisingly, 86% of farms (one participant per farm) that had no prior warning that a case of BSE was possible in Canada also did not know what the potential consequences of finding a case might be. Even among those who had gotten prior warning that a case was possible, 57% did not know what the potential consequences of finding a case might be.

Canada's Closed Borders

About one third of farms (33%) knew that Canada had already taken action against other countries where there was BSE and had closed its borders to imports of Japanese and Brazilian beef before the case of BSE was discovered in Alberta.

Forewarning Farmers and Ranchers in the Future

Participants were asked to suggest what information would be most helpful in convincing them of the likelihood of a crisis like BSE affecting them. Most focused on mechanisms of communication, rather than content. Using the media was mentioned most often, but then only by 8%. Different answers concerning provision of information to them totalled 18%, with an emphasis on accurate and complete information. The role of the government in giving warning and/or planning for the crisis was mentioned by 6%. About 7% countered the idea of forewarning at all: “A forewarning is no good because a disease *could* happen - not *will* happen - also we don't know when or where.”



As one participant commented, it is possible that this crisis of BSE in Canada has changed the way farmers and ranchers monitor information: “I think that since this has happened the farmer pays more attention to everything that is happening in every country in concerns to livestock.”