

Brussels, 22 April 2008

Beef on the bone: Commission increases the age limit at which the vertebral column must be removed from beef.

The European Commission adopted today a Regulation raising the age limit at which the vertebral column must be removed from beef from 24 to 30 months. Following the 3 month scrutiny period by the European Parliament, the Regulation has been finally adopted by the European Commission. The Regulation, based on scientific advice from the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), increases the age at which the vertebral column of slaughtered cattle must be removed from 24 to 30 months. This measure is one of the EU measures set out in the TSE Roadmap ([see IP/05/952](#)) in July 2005 which have been made possible by the improvement in the BSE situation, while maintaining the highest levels of food safety and consumer protection.

Androulla Vassiliou, European Commissioner for Health, said: "Today's decision is a further reflection of the progress Europe has made in the battle against BSE. The Commission took into account the latest scientific knowledge, and discussed this extensively with Member States and the European Parliament. We are confident that the high level of consumer protection provided by our BSE rules over the past decade will be maintained."

Since October 2000, the vertebral column has been part of the EU list of Specified Risk Material (SRM), considered to pose the greatest risk of BSE transmission. Under EU BSE legislation, all SRM has been required to be removed and destroyed in bovine animals over a certain age, to prevent it entering the food and feed chain. Due to this, and other stringent risk reducing measures, there has been a significant decline in the number of positive BSE cases detected in the EU over the past few years, and the age of those positive cases has steadily increased. These positive developments led the Commission to reflect on possible amendments of certain TSE measures in place, with a view to updating them in line with the improved situation.

In April 2007, EFSA published an opinion supporting an increase in the age limit for bovine vertebral column removal, and stating that even up to 33 months could be considered a considerably safe limit. On the basis of this opinion, and taking into account the views of Member States and Parliament, the Commission proposed 30 months as the most practical age limit to allow the highest safety margin against BSE.

The higher age limit for vertebral column removal is expected to have a positive impact on the competitiveness of farmers and meat industries, and to reduce the amount of SRM waste generated in the EU and therefore to reduce the costs for its destruction. It also brings EU legislation in line with the international standards of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE).