



European Food Safety Authority

SCIENTIFIC PANEL ON BIOLOGICAL HAZARDS

Brussels 28 January 2005

Statement on the assessment of safety with respect to the consumption of goat meat and goat meat products in relation to BSE/TSE”

Following the findings of a research group in France concerning a suspected case of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) infection in a goat, EFSA was asked by the Health and Consumer Protection Directorate General (DG SANCO) of the European Commission, and subsequently by the European Parliament, to provide scientific advice on the human health risks related to the consumption of goat milk and goat meat. This case, identified as a TSE in a normal slaughter goat in the course of active surveillance in 2002, was confirmed by subsequent molecular phenotyping and a two-year bio-assay as indistinguishable from a BSE infection. EFSA’s Scientific Panel on Biological Hazards (BIOHAZ) undertook to update previous opinions related to risks associated with the consumption of goat and sheep products in the event that BSE were to be confirmed in the goat concerned. In light of the conclusions of the Community Reference Laboratory’s expert panel confirming the presence of BSE infection in the goat (http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/food/biosafety/bse/crl_statement_tse_goats_28-01-05_en.pdf) the BIOHAZ Panel outlines the current state of knowledge and affairs concerning the assessment of BSE-related risks with respect to the consumption of goat meat and goat meat products.

With regards to possible health risks associated with the consumption of milk and milk products derived thereof, EFSA’s Scientific Expert Working Group on BSE/TSE of the BIOHAZ Panel published preliminary advice on 26 November 2004 http://www.efsa.eu.int/science/biohaz/biohaz_documents/709/bdoc_statement_goatsmilk_en1.pdf. Experts agreed that: “...in light of current scientific knowledge and irrespective of their geographical origin, milk and milk derivatives (eg lactoferrin, lactose) from small ruminants are unlikely to present any risk of TSE contamination provided that milk is sourced from clinically healthy animals.”

With regards to the provision of scientific advice related to the safety of goat meat and goat meat products, and following a feasibility study, the BIOHAZ Panel confirmed that significant gaps exist in the information required to carry out a quantitative risk assessment with regards to BSE/TSE. In particular, the Panel highlighted the absence of information regarding consumption of goat meat and goat meat products and other data required to assess exposure, particularly the true prevalence of BSE infection in goats under natural conditions and the distribution of infectivity in goat tissues.

From the epidemiological data available today, no link is indicated between goat meat and meat product consumption and variant Creutzfeldt Jakob Disease (vCJD). However, the BIOHAZ Panel recognises the lack of knowledge with respect to the incubation period of vCJD and exposure levels of the human population which limits confidence in this observation.

The advice on safety of goat products as concluded in the opinion of the Scientific Steering Committee (SSC) opinion of April 2002 on “Safe sourcing of small ruminants’ material” and reiterated by the Opinion* of the Scientific Panel on Biological Hazards of the European Food Safety Authority on “The interpretation of results of EU surveillance of transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs) in ovine and caprine animals, culling strategies for TSEs in small ruminants and the TSE-related safety of certain small ruminant products” adopted on 26 November 2003, remains valid. However, the BIOHAZ panel and further recognises that more information is needed to assess the significance of the single French case recognizes the need to carry out a quantitative risk assessment concerning BSE-related risks associated with the consumption of goat meat and goat meat products. This is expected to be completed by July 2005 if pertinent data will become available.

* ”The current document might be appropriately updated when ..~....reliable data on the prevalence become available”.

1. Background

Following the earlier announcement of a suspected case of BSE infection in a goat (28 October 2004) and the preliminary and final confirmation by the Community Reference Laboratory (CRL), on 25 November 2004 and 28 January 2005 respectively, and taking into account the formal mandate from the Health and Consumer Protection Directorate General of the European Commission (DG SANCO) (*D(2004) DS/cm/421319*) of the European Commission requesting EFSA’s Scientific Panel on Biological Hazards for an opinion on a **“Quantitative assessment of risk posed to humans by tissues of small ruminants (SMRU) in case BSE is present in these animal populations”** and a similar mandate from the European Parliament (EP) (letter 314273 of 21.12.2004), the following update on the state of play is provided.

Overview of actions taken by EFSA

EFSA launched a series of actions following the announcement by the French Authorities of a suspected case of BSE infection in a goat. These actions focused on the collection of scientific data and other information from scientists as well as from food safety authorities and research institutes in Member States in order to be able to carry out a quantitative risk assessment with regards to the possible risks involved in the consumption of goat products should a BSE infection be confirmed.

1. A feasibility study was launched on 30 October 2004, to check the availability and usefulness of existing or new scientific data and to collect other information as the basis for carrying out a quantitative assessment of the risks involved in the consumption of goat products.
2. Questions were sent to the European Commission (DG Sanco and DG RTD) asking that EFSA be provided with relevant data relating ongoing scientific experiments and on statistics of goats and sheep *i.e.* numbers tested for TSE/BSE and results in the Member States taking account of genotypes.
3. Letters were sent to EFSA's Advisory Forum on 3rd of November 2004 and 30th of November 2004 in order to request that Member States and their national reference laboratories and different research institutes to provide EFSA with an update on any planned or on-going scientific research at national level linking BSE and small ruminants, including studies on the infectivity of milk.
4. A letter was sent to different leading European experts seeking their contribution on an update of scientific knowledge related to opinions available on the subject; new findings arising from the review of scientific literature, research projects ongoing, and where available, intermediate results or an indication of the timing of future results.

Outcome of all consultations: A summary of all contributions received was discussed at the first meeting (11th January 2005) of the working group on "Quantitative assessment of risk posed to humans by tissues of small ruminants (SMRU) in case BSE is present in these animal populations".

2. Assessing the safety of goat meat and goat meat products with regards to TSE/BSE: state of play and future developments.

Following the first meeting of the working group (11th January 2005) constituted to address the specific mandate with respect to the safety of goat meat and goat meat products, the expert group outlined its first conclusions concerning how best to address the task at hand:

1. A full assessment of the feasibility of conducting a quantitative assessment of the risks involved in the consumption of goat products is, given the lack of new published information and the limitation of previous data, dependent to a great extent on the availability of unpublished findings from Member States and third countries. Key inputs considered indispensable for carrying out a quantitative risk assessment are data related to:
 - a. The species barrier
 - b. Infectious load and distribution in goat tissues
 - c. Prevalence of infection
 - d. Human consumption levels.

If such data are not forthcoming or prove to be insufficient, there would be no basis on which to conduct a quantitative risk assessment (QRA) relative to the consumption of goat meat and goat meat products. Should this be the case, measures for the safe sourcing of small ruminant materials should be reviewed in respect to the level of BSE infection in goats.

2. The epidemiological data available provided by the surveillance of variant Creutzfeldt Jakob Disease (vCJD) indicate that there is currently no evidence of a link between goat meat consumption and a higher risk of vCJD in certain ethnic groups (likely to consume more goat meat) of the UK population as compared with other groups. Similarly there is also no observed link on the occupational risk of handling goat meat and goat meat products in the UK. Such epidemiological analyses should also be made in other countries where BSE has been found. However, the BIOHAZ Panel recognises the lack of knowledge with respect to the incubation period of vCJD and exposure levels of the human population which limits confidence in these observations.
3. In addition to the quantitative risk assessment to be carried out by EFSA, DG SANCO of the European Commission introduced a three step testing scheme* in sheep and goats (EC regulation No 36/2005) and announced today an increased monitoring programme in goats. These measures will provide more data on the real prevalence of suspected TSE cases (and possible BSE infections) in goats. It is anticipated that the mid-term evaluation of the results of this increased surveillance (after 6 months) will concur with EFSA's opinion on the safety of goat meat and goat meat products. EC regulation 999/2001 further specifies safety measures already in place, such as the condemnation of the carcass of cattle, sheep and goats in case of a confirmed positive TSE case and the removal at slaughter of Specified Risk Materials (SRM) from cattle, sheep and goats.

*three step testing : rapid testing, discriminatory molecular testing and mouse bio assay testing.