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Japan Moves Closer to Abolishing Domestic BSE Testing

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Agricultural Situation

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Livestock and Products

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Report Highlights:

On Tuesday, July 12, the Food Safety Commission Prion Sub-Committee concluded its draft risk assessment of a proposal to abolish domestic *bovine spongiform encephalopathy* (BSE) testing requirements for cattle 48-months of age and older. The draft assessment determined that risks to human health from abolishing so-called age-based testing would be negligible. Pending the outcome of public comment periods and stakeholder information sessions, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare could lift domestic age-based BSE testing requirements within the next 12 months.

General Information:

On July 12, 2016 the Prion Sub-Committee of the Food Safety Commission (FSC) concluded its risk assessment of a December 2015 Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) proposal to abolish Japan's current age-based testing of domestic cattle for *bovine spongiform encephalopathy* (BSE). The FSC Prion Sub-Committee draft report determined that the risks to human health from eliminating age-based testing would be negligible.

On July 13, the FSC opened a 30-day public comment period that will conclude on August 11, 2016. The FSC will host risk communication outreach events in Tokyo (July 21), in Sapporo (July 27), in Osaka (August 1), and in Fukuoka (August 4). Following the compilation and assessment of public comments, the FSC would then finalize the Prion Sub-Committee's report and submit a regulatory recommendation to MHLW. MHLW would then conduct outreach events with key stakeholders across the country, including consumer groups, producer groups, prefectural governments and legislators. MHLW would then publish a draft revision to the relevant Ministerial Ordinance, initiating a subsequent 30-day public comment period. After considering information collected during the public comment period, MHLW would finalize its draft and revise the Ministerial Ordinance accordingly.

Japan initiated a comprehensive BSE testing regime in 2001, following its first confirmed case of BSE. The current regime requires that all cattle 48-months of age and older be tested for BSE. The draft report from the FSC Prion Subcommittee recommends that cattle 24-months of age and older and demonstrating symptoms of central nervous system diseases continue to be tested for BSE. The December 2015 MHLW proposal was predicated on three factors: 1) Japan's ruminant feed ban has been and remains effective; 2) Japan has not detected a single case of classical BSE since the age-based testing threshold was raised to 48-months of age and older; and 3) cattle developing atypical BSE are almost all over 96-months of age.