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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: AOB item for the meeting of the "Agriculture and Fisheries" Council of
22 and 23 June 2026:
BSE monitoring in Europe: alignment with World Organization for Animal
Health (WOAH) criteria
*- Information from Belgium, supported by Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia,
Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Portugal
and Sweden*

Regulation (EC) No 999/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 May 2001 laying down rules for the prevention, control and eradication of certain transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSE) requires Member States to establish a programme for the active surveillance of TSE. This programme started in 2001 and, initially, healthy cattle for slaughter and animals at risk (dead animals, emergency slaughter, suspected cases) were tested. From 2009 onwards, some Member States were able to benefit from certain options to revise their annual bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) surveillance programme, notably regarding the minimum age of animals to be tested or the end of screening in healthy cattle for slaughter. The results from past years show that all the efforts made by Member States have produced results, with the number of BSE cases falling significantly. In 2024, 956.398 cattle were tested in the EU and only three atypical cases were detected.

Evolution of the global epidemiological situation regarding BSE has already led the World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH) to make significant revisions to the chapter of the Terrestrial Code relating to BSE in 2023: the framework for the surveillance programme is now based on passive surveillance (detection of clinical cases) and a risk-based screening programme. To illustrate the difference with surveillance in Europe, it is worth noting that the United States of America, which has a livestock population of 87.2 million animals, carries out an average of 25.000 BSE tests per year in accordance with the criteria set by the WOAH.

It is essential that the principles governing the BSE surveillance established by the Member States take account of the evolving epidemiological situation. The Commission has taken the first step in this process by presenting a proposal to amend the TSE Regulation as part of the package of measures aimed at simplifying food and feed safety regulations (*Omnibus X*). The aim is to enable the Commission to adapt the content of the annexes to the TSE Regulation by means of delegated acts. Furthermore, at the request of the Commission, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) published a scientific opinion at the end of April entitled '*Possible alignment of EU BSE surveillance with the new WOAH provisions*'. In this opinion, EFSA assesses the feasibility of applying the surveillance criteria established by the WOAH to the European context and of implementing additional surveillance measures. In its recommendations, EFSA suggests continuing the surveillance of bovine carcasses, for which the minimum age could be raised to 60 or 72 months.

According to an initial estimation, aligning European requirements with those set by the WOAH could reduce the cost of BSE monitoring in Belgium by 90%. Continuing to monitor the carcasses of cattle over 72 months old would, indeed, reduce the number of samples to be analyzed to 50% of the current level. Given that the Commission's support to Member States through the co-financing of veterinary programmes has fallen significantly in recent years – with the co-financing rate for BSE set at just 12% of eligible costs – the money saved could be used to strengthen surveillance and control measures against emerging animal diseases and zoonoses that are on EU's borders.

In conclusion, Member States' resources are limited, while the challenges they face are growing. It is therefore essential to ensure that expenditure is allocated as efficiently as possible so that we can continue to protect animal and human health. **We therefore urge the Commission to take now all necessary measures to adapt the requirements relating to BSE monitoring as quickly as possible.**
