

Atypical BSE detected in Switzerland in a cow from Germany

Insel Riems, 13 March 2012. In the beginning of March, the Federal Veterinary Office (BVET) in Switzerland detected atypical BSE in a cow born in Germany. The animal of the species German Angus was born in Germany in 2005 and sold to Switzerland at the end of 2006. After the occurrence of clinical symptoms, the cow was killed at the end of February and a subsequent BSE rapid test resulted in BSE suspicion. This suspicion was confirmed by the BSE reference laboratory in Bern. Further investigations revealed the presence of a so-called atypical BSE which occurs very rarely spontaneously in older animals and is not associated with the feeding of infectious prions. The case demonstrates that the regulations in force for BSE testing are still important.

BSE (Bovine Spongiforme Enzephalopathy) causes diseases of cattle characterized by sponge-like changes of the brain. The animal disease was first detected in 1986 in Great Britain. In Germany, the first case in an animal born in Germany occurred at the end of 2000, until 2009 a total of 412 BSE cases were detected. Two of these cases were diagnosed as atypical BSE. Atypical BSE occurs in two different forms, which differ from each other and from classical BSE with regard to their biological properties and the biochemical characteristics of the pathogenic prion protein.

So far, such cases have been observed in cattle aged eight years or older. The affected animal in Switzerland was just under seven years old. Since July 2011, healthy slaughtered cattle in Germany aged 72 months (6 years) or older must be tested for BSE, for sick or injured slaughtered cattle the test age is four years, i.e. significantly below the age limit of the now detected atypical BSE case.

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