

BSE - SPECIAL STATUS FOR NI

Line to Take

- UK's principal objective is to have the illegal ban on the entire UK beef industry lifted.
- Northern Ireland with its low incidence of BSE and computerised tracing system will be able to comply readily with the requirements for lifting the ban.

Background

1. The EU framework for the lifting of the export ban applies to the entire UK. However, if Northern Ireland as an integral part of the UK complies with the conditions at an earlier date than other regions, it may be possible to have the ban lifted earlier for Northern Ireland.
2. Conditions favouring earlier compliance are:
 - Low incidence of BSE
 - Computerised traceability system
 - Mainly grass based feed regimes.
3. Agriculture Department officials have worked up a "certified herds scheme" based on these principles which has been submitted to Brussels. This would be very advantageous to Northern Ireland if accepted. It is hoped that Northern Ireland would receive sympathetic consideration from Brussels.

Importance of Beef to NI

- Beef production and dairying account for 4% of the GDP of NI.
- Some 85% of the farms in NI have cattle.
- Output from the beef sector is worth £414m per annum equivalent to 40% of total agricultural output.
- 55% by volume of the beef produced in NI is exported outside the UK, 70% outside NI.
- The beef industry employs 60,000 people on farms and 3,500 in processing plants. An additional 2,000-3,000 jobs in ancillary industries (feed, fertilisers, machinery, services etc) could also be affected.
- Before the EU ban NI exporters were able to export beef to high quality outlets in Europe.
- As a result of its heavier reliance on agriculture and beef production, NI has been affected more severely by the EU ban than GB.

NI BSE Statistics

Since the first case was recorded in Northern Ireland in July 1988 there has been a total of 1724 cases (11/9/96). This compares with a total of just under 163,000 in Great Britain and 143 in the Republic of Ireland.

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