

Public Perceptions and Responses to Mad Cow Disease: A National Survey of Americans

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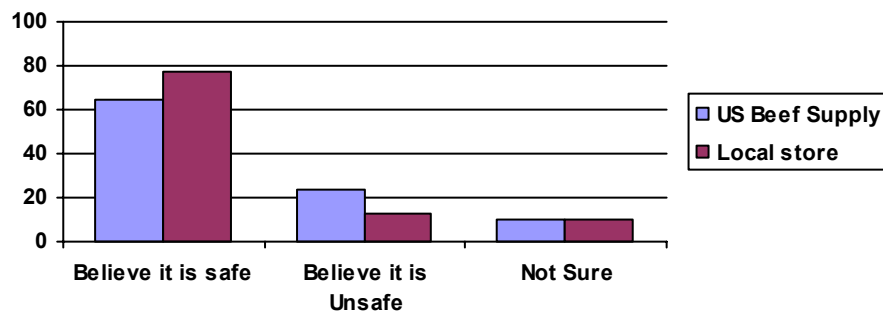
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The survey was conducted with a national probability sample of 1,001 adults in the continental United States. Data was collected Jan 15 -18 by the opinion polling firm Schulman, Ronca, Bucuvalas, Inc (SRBI). Interview length was 10.5 minutes. Cooperation rate was 70 percent. The data was weighted for age, education and income. The margin of error is +/- 3.2 percent.

Key Findings:

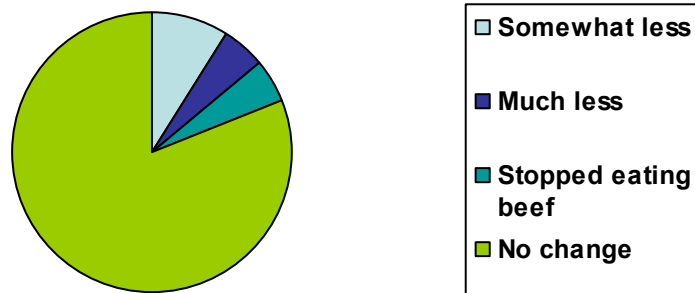
- **Awareness is high.** Most Americans (92 percent) say they have heard of mad cow disease and 85 percent are aware of the case of mad cow disease discovered in the United States in December.
- **Of those who had heard of the December case, 65 percent believe the nation's beef supply is safe, 24 percent believe it is unsafe and 10 percent are unsure.** However, they expressed more confidence that the beef in their local store is safe from mad cow disease; 77 percent believe the beef in their local store is safe, 13 percent believe it is unsafe and 10 percent are unsure. [These numbers are comparable to a recent CNN/Times poll.](#)

Faith in the beef supply (as percentage of those who knew about the mad cow case)



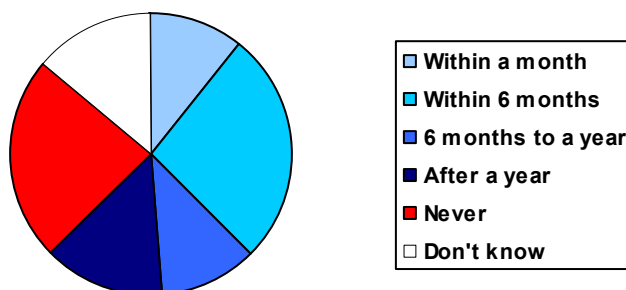
- Nearly 1 in 5 (19.5 percent) of those who knew about the case (and had eaten some beef during the three months prior to its disclosure) say they have since reduced their beef consumption. About 9 percent say they eat somewhat less beef, 5 percent say they eat much less and nearly 5 percent say they have stopped eating beef altogether. As such, **about 4 percent of the total population claims to have stopped eating beef.**

Change in beef consumption



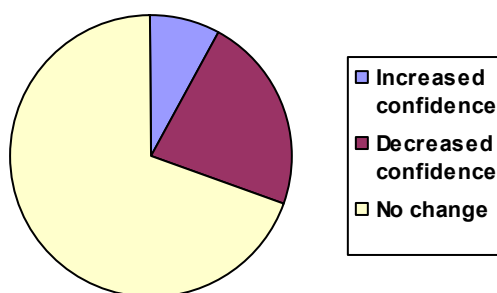
- **Nearly a quarter (24 percent) of those who claim to have *stopped* eating beef say they will never resume eating it.** However, 11 percent say they will resume their normal beef consumption within a month, 27 percent say they will resume within 6 months, 11 percent between 6 months and a year and 14 percent after a year (14 percent do not know when they would start eating beef again).

When will you resume eating beef?

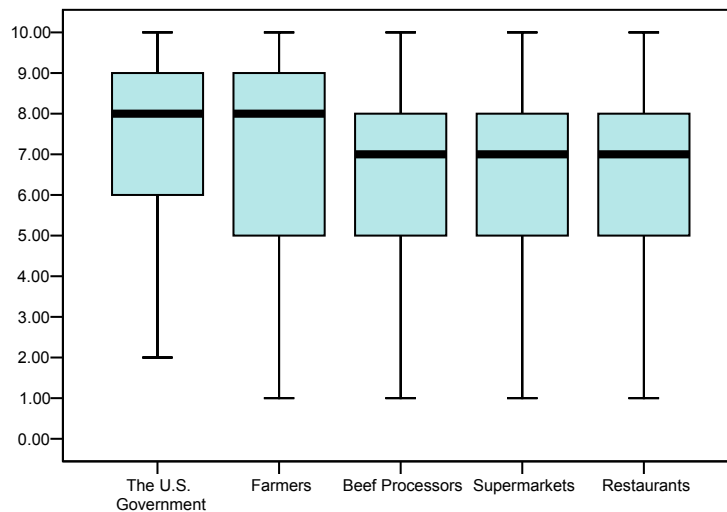


- **For most, confidence in the beef supply remains unchanged.** Most Americans (68 percent) who heard of the mad cow case say their confidence in the U.S. beef supply is unchanged and 8 percent say their confidence has increased. A little over 22 percent say their confidence in the beef supply has decreased (7 percent say it has decreased ‘a great deal’, 9 percent ‘some’, 6 percent ‘a little’).

Change in confidence for the beef supply



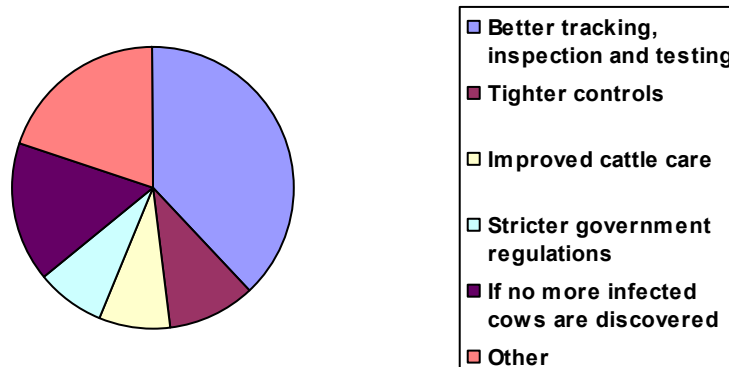
- **Most give high marks to the government and farmers for their handling of the case.** On a 1 to 10 scale where 10 meant “very confident,” the median rating for confidence that “the government is taking appropriate measures to control mad cow disease” was 8, and most respondents scored their confidence between 6 and 9. The median rating for confidence in farmers was also 8, with most respondents giving a score between 5 and 9. The confidence in beef processors, supermarkets and restaurants was similar; the median score for each was 7, with most respondents giving a rating between 5 and 8.



On a scale of one to ten, where one is not at all confident and ten is very confident, how confident are you that each of the following is taking the appropriate measures to control mad cow disease?

- **Of those whose confidence in the U.S. beef supply has decreased, the majority say greater government regulation would restore their faith.** More than a third (38 percent) desire better tracking, inspection and testing of both beef and cattle, nearly 10 percent want tighter controls on cattle feed, 8 percent want improvements in the way cattle are cared for and 8 percent suggest stricter government regulations in general. Only 16 percent say their confidence would return if no more cases of mad cow disease are discovered.

What will restore your confidence in the beef supply?



- **Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman’s statements that “the likelihood of human illness resulting from the case of mad cow disease is extremely low” increased confidence in the safety of the beef supply.** Two thirds of Americans (66 percent) who had heard of the mad cow case were also aware of Secretary Veneman’s statements. Of those, 17 percent feel somewhat more confident and 5 percent feel much more confident in the safety of beef as a result Veneman’s comments. Only 4 percent say Veneman’s comments made them somewhat less confident and 2 percent much less confident. However, most respondents (72 percent) say these comments did not affect their confidence.
- **More than three quarters of Americans (78 percent) who had heard about the mad cow case are also aware that the USDA had determined that the infected cow was most likely born in Canada.** This information inspired 12 percent to feel somewhat more confident and 6 percent to feel much more confident in the safety of the U.S. beef supply, while leading 5 percent to feel somewhat less confident and 4 percent much less confident. Most respondents (72 percent) say this information did not affect their confidence.

- **Many have relatively low levels of knowledge about the disease.** Only 56 percent knew the statement, “Cooking beef thoroughly will reduce the chance of getting sick from beef contaminated with mad cow disease,” was false. A third (34 percent) believe that other cases of mad cow disease have been found in the U.S. More than a third (37 percent) believe that mad cow disease is caused by cows eating genetically modified feed. Eighteen percent believe that people in the U.S. have gotten the human equivalent of mad cow disease from eating U.S. beef and 13 percent are not sure. More than one quarter (28 percent) believe that the human equivalent of mad cow disease can be treated using antibiotics and one quarter are unsure (24 percent).

	True	False	Don't Know
Cooking beef thoroughly will reduce the chance of getting sick from beef contaminated with mad cow disease	31%	56%	13%
Other cases of mad cow disease have been found in cows in the U.S.	34%	56%	10%
The human equivalent of mad cow disease is often fatal	75%	16%	9%
Mad cow disease is caused by cows eating genetically modified feed	37%	47%	16%
People in the US have gotten the human equivalent of mad cow disease from eating U.S. beef	18%	69%	13%
The human equivalent of Mad Cow Disease can be treated using antibiotics	28%	48%	24%

- **Few Americans (6 percent) are very worried that they or someone in their family will contract mad cow disease during their lifetimes,** yet 70 percent believe that it is somewhat or very likely that another mad cow case will be found in the United States. Three in five respondents (61 percent) say it is somewhat or very likely that someone in the United States will eat beef from an animal with mad cow disease, while 18 percent say it is ‘somewhat likely’ and 12 percent say it is ‘very likely’ that meat from an infected cow had been shipped to their state. Only 15 percent say they thought it was somewhat or very likely that someone they know will eat beef from an animal with mad cow disease and only 10 percent say it is somewhat or very likely that *they* will eat beef from an animal with the disease.
- Finally, the respondents were told that ‘There are approximately 100 million cows in the U.S.’ They were then asked for their best guess as to how many other cows are likely to be currently infected with mad cow disease. While 16 percent say they cannot guess, **only 12 percent think no other cows would be found with mad cow disease.** The median number of cows respondents guess will be found with the disease was 50. However, more than a quarter of respondents estimate that a thousand or more cows likely have the disease, 10 percent say it is likely that 10,000 or more have the disease and 5 percent believe that 100,000 or more cows may have the disease.