

Is There a Scrapie-Like Disease in Cattle?R.F. Marsh*, DVM, PhD and G.R. Hartsough[†], DVM

Transmissible mink encephalopathy (TME) is a rare disease of ranch-reared mink which is indistinguishable from sheep scrapie. Previous studies on the epidemiology of TME have not identified a definite source of infection for mink. Studies on experimental transmission have shown that mink are susceptible to intracerebral inoculation of American Suffolk scrapie, but that the incubation periods are longer (>1 year) than those observed in natural outbreaks of TME (<1 year).

In April of 1985, a mink rancher in Wisconsin reported a debilitating neurologic disease in his herd which we diagnosed as TME by histopathologic findings confirmed by experimental transmission to mink and squirrel monkeys. The rancher was a "dead stock" feeder using mostly (>95%) downer or dead dairy cattle and a few horses. Sheep had never been fed.

We believe that these findings may indicate the presence of a previously unrecognized scrapie-like disease in cattle and wish to alert dairy practitioners to this possibility.

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PROCEEDINGS OF THE SEVENTH ANNUAL WESTERN CONFERENCE

FOR FOOD ANIMAL VETERINARY MEDICINE, University of

Arizona, March 17-19, 1986