



**P.O. Box 269, Elizabethtown, PA 17022**

**Phone: 717/367-1168 Fax: 717/367-9096**

**Website: [www.aamp.com](http://www.aamp.com) Email: [aamp@aamp.com](mailto:aamp@aamp.com)**

## **REMOVAL OF VERTEBRAL COLUMN FROM CATTLE 30 MONTHS OF AGE AND OLDER**

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To: AAMP MEMBERS  
MEAT SLAUGHTERS AND MEAT PROCESSORS

SUBJECT: REMOVAL OF VERTEBRAL COLUMN FROM CATTLE 30 MONTHS OF AGE AND OLDER

This information has been created to clarify the issues related to the removal of the vertebral column from cattle that are 30 months of age and older. According to Docket No. 03-0251F (*Prohibition of the Use of Specified Risk Materials for Human Food and Requirements for the Disposition of Non-Ambulatory Disabled Cattle*) the vertebral column, spinal cord, and dorsal root ganglia from cattle that are 30 months of age and older were identified as specified risk materials.

It was noted in FSIS Notice 9-04 (*Verification Instructions for the Interim Final Rule Regarding Specified Risk Materials (SRMs) in Cattle*) that the vertebral columns from cattle 30 months of age and older do not have to be removed during the slaughter operation. However, if they are not removed in the slaughter operation, procedures should be put in place to ensure that the vertebral columns are adequately identified as being from cattle 30 months of age and older, and that means of identification transfers with the vertebral columns until they are appropriately disposed of as inedible.

If possible, all visible SRM debris is to be removed on the kill floor (i.e. spinal cord). SRM debris is to be removed with a knife (trimming) from exposed muscle or by scraping the debris from the exposed bone before washing. After washing and passing final inspection, the only remaining SRM material is the vertebral column which is considered "inedible material" to be removed during carcass processing, segregated and disposed of as any "inedible" material.

FSIS is currently allowing establishments to simply maintain a separation in the processing area between young and old animals. Process the carcasses from animals younger than 30 months of age first, and then process the carcasses from animal 30 months of age and older. When possible, establishments may choose to bone animals on the rail, which is possible with boning cows and bulls. On the rail boning is not always possible with the fabrication of carcasses into steaks, roasts, etc. USDA is allowing bone-in primals from animals identified as 30 months of age and older to be placed on tables and saws in the processing room. The only time the tables and saws would require washing would be:

- When going from older (30 months of age and older), to younger (under 30 months of age) animals;
- If the saw or a knife would accidentally slip into the spinal cord channel, even though the cord had been previously removed on the kill floor.

When breaking carcasses from cattle that are 30 months of age and older on a band saw, the resulting bone dust on the meat is considered an SRM and needs to be scrapped off, before boning the meat. The concern at the band saw is not with the bone dust itself, rather that the saw blade may have passed through a nerve group and mixed the nerve tissue with the bone dust.

The SRM removal requirement is removing the "visible gross tissues and potential contaminations.