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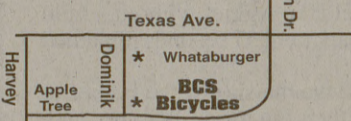
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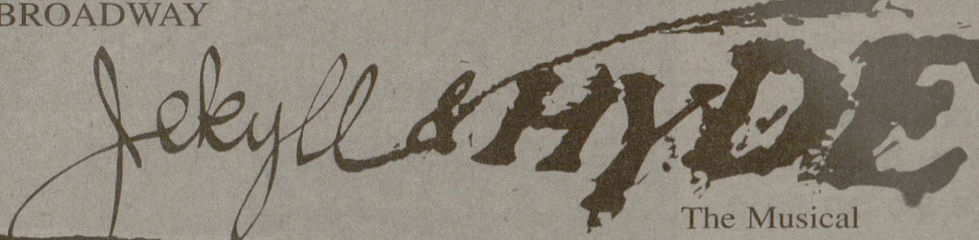
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'Purchase for destruction' to erase mad cow disease

LOUGHREA, Ireland (AP) — Noel Garner, a bushy-haired farmer raising cattle in the verdant hills of western Ireland, was stunned when mad cow disease struck his small herd months ago.

An even bigger shock came a few days later, when the carcass he had buried at the edge of a pasture showed up back on his doorstep.

Neighbors had driven a mechanized digger to the grave, unearthed the cow and carted it back to Garner's place in an old oil barrel.

They were afraid that diseased particles would seep into their water supply, said Gus Egan, who runs the livestock mart in Loughrea, County Galway. "The people were right," he said. "I'd do the same thing."

The case highlights the problem facing European countries as they initiate mass slaughters to stop the dreaded disease and revive collapsed markets: what to do with the bodies.

The "purchase for destruction" program launched by the 15-nation European Union this month foresees buying and incinerating up to 2 million head of cattle by the end of June, at an estimated cost to governments of \$1 billion.

But implementation has been stymied in places by logistics as well as ethical concerns about sending so much prime beef up in smoke.

"It's an awful shame and a disgrace," Egan said, echoing a sentiment heard across Europe. "With all the people starving all over the world, to destroy perfectly good meat ..."

New evidence that mad cow disease had spread from Britain to continental herds prompted EU leaders last month to adopt mandatory testing for cattle over 30 months. Any animal that is not confirmed free of

BSE — bovine spongiform encephalopathy — cannot go to market.

Germany, which started testing three weeks early, has found only 16 cases out of more than 112,000 tests conducted. Belgium found two in 7,550 tests.

Ireland has had more cases — almost 600 since 1987 — than any country outside Britain. But of

17,550 tests so far this month, not one revealed BSE, according to Irish Agriculture Minister Joe Walsh.

Yet the wide-scale testing has led to isolated discoveries of BSE in places that had considered themselves pristine, including an Italian slaughterhouse that supplies McDonald's.

Thus, a measure meant to reassure Europeans has actually heightened fears of eating infected meat and contracting the fatal, brain-wasting, new variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease.

Beef sales have tumbled by 27 percent across the EU — and as much as 50 percent in some countries. Many non-EU countries have suspended imports altogether.

And because sales are down, vast numbers of healthy cattle must

be slaughtered just to prevent over-supply.

Ireland, a country with twice as many cows as people, usually exports 90 percent of the 550,000 tons of beef it produces annually to countries like Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf states — all of which have enacted temporary bans.

"Farmers have to regularly bring their old cows that are ready for slaughter to the slaughterhouse, but right now no one is buying them," Franz Fischler, the EU agriculture commissioner, explained in an interview with the German weekly Die Zeit.

"We can't simply shoot them to the moon," he added.

Yet the sheer numbers are making even slaughter and disposal difficult.

Lacking enough abattoirs and incinerators, authorities in Portugal's Azores Islands Monday postponed the slaughter of some 5,000 cattle. They plan to send some of the doomed cattle to the Portuguese mainland.

Ireland has only a handful of small, private incinerators that handle hospital and pharmaceutical waste.

Since 1997, Irish slaughterhouses had been shipping the potentially infectious animal parts — brain, spinal cord and parts of the intestines — to the only plant in the country licensed to deal with it: Monery By-Products in County Cavan.

The plant turns the material into powdery meal and liquid tallow. Until last month these were shipped to Germany for incineration. Now EU rules require the entire intestine to be treated as "specific risk material," trebling the weight of material Monery has to process.

— Gus Egan
livestock market manager

Congo buries slain president

KINSHASA, Congo (AP) — A weeping Joseph Kabila, newly installed leader of Congo, mourned his slain father Sunday as memorials for the president shifted to the crumbling capital where he was assassinated five days ago.

Thousands of supporters grieved in the streets for Laurent Kabila, crying and waving palm fronds as a motorcade bearing his casket wound through the city.

Many wailed and chanted "Mzee, Mzee, Mzee" — a Swahili nickname for Kabila that means "respected elder."

"We cry for our Mzee," said one mourner, Jean-Francois Ngola. "He paid the price for his independence and dignity. He remains an example of respect for me."

But others in this deeply divided Central African nation expressed little affection for the man who steered the country deeper into poverty and chaos.

While state television trumpeted that "all of Kinshasa is crying for Laurent Desire Kabila," police at a Simba Zikida marketplace were said to be ordering people to line the streets leading to the open-air Palace of the People, where Kabila will lie in state until his funeral Tuesday.

"They cannot force people to mourn. Even if it were my own father I would not accept it," said one shopper, who identified herself only as Honorine. "But I'm afraid the soldiers will make trouble against the people."

The unexpected outpouring of grief in a city Kabila distrusted and rarely stayed in may be explained by anger in the majority Lingala language: "First we cry for the dead, then we bury the dead. Then when it's finished, there will be big trouble."

In Luanda, Angola, the presidents of Kabila's three foreign allies — Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe — Sunday and pledged to keep their troops in Congo to support government forces.

In a joint statement they urged all factions in the conflict to "contain offensive military measures."

Only Angola, however, gave public backing to a new president.

Joseph Kabila, surrounded by soldiers from Congo and Angola, wept as his father's casket was unloaded from the presidential plane and marched across the tarmac to a waiting open-top trailer after its arrival from home city of Lubumbashi, 1,000 miles to the south.

The young leader, to be sworn in as president in days after the funeral, walked behind the casket as it was carried past two rows of sobbing officials. Six military brass strained to heave the casket onto a trailer as another officer led the procession with a large portrait of slain president.

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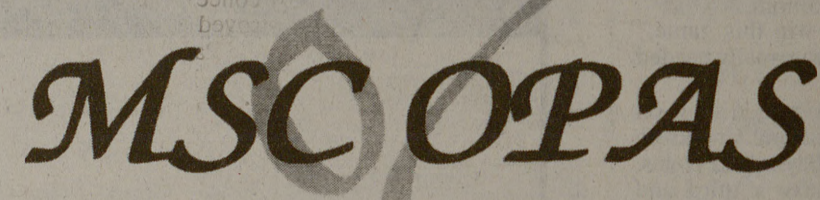
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