

January 22, 2008

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Chairman, House Committee on Agriculture

The Honorable Bob Goodlatte
Ranking Member, House Committee on Agriculture

Dear Chairman Peterson and Ranking Member Goodlatte,

The over thirty undersigned organizations respectfully request that the House Agriculture Committee hold a hearing to examine and evaluate the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) pending plan to import beef from certain regions of Argentina.

The USDA proposed its rule with little publicity on January 5, 2007, but has yet to issue a final determination on the proposal. We have been unable to ascertain the status of the plan or the likelihood of its implementation.

This issue is very significant. Argentina, and its neighbor Brazil, have documented problems with foot and mouth disease (FMD). We are gravely concerned that regionalizing trade with Argentina will leave U.S. livestock industries vulnerable to catastrophic disease.

USDA's plan would allow imports from a handful of regions that would be deemed to be disease-free, by establishing imaginary borders between "safe" and "unsafe" zones in Argentina. Under USDA's plan, a risk exists for exporters to use these "safe" zones as portals to trans-ship from "unsafe" zones.

It would be impossible to protect America from a FMD outbreak under such a system. FMD is a highly infectious, viral, airborne disease that doesn't stop at imaginary borders, and virtually any host can carry the virus from one location to another. According to the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) website, FMD is believed to be the most economically devastating livestock disease in the world, and if it were introduced into the U.S. it could cause billions of dollars in losses to the U.S. economy. A recent study completed by Kansas State University researchers shows that an outbreak of FMD in Kansas alone could impact the economy by as much as \$945 million.

As your committee examines the safety of food imports in the coming months, it is our hope that you will include Argentina in the discussion. We appreciate your immediate attention to this matter, and remain available to answer questions and provide additional information if needed.

Sincerely,

United States Cattlemen's Association
National Farmers Union
American Agri-Women

Alaska Marine Conservation Council
California Dairy Campaign
California Farmers Union
Cattle Producers of Washington
Colorado Independent Cattle Growers Association
Colorado Women Involved in Farm Economics
Crowley County Stockgrower's Association (Colorado)
Food and Water Watch
Independent Beef Association of North Dakota
Independent Cattleman of Nebraska
Independent Cattlemen's Association of Texas
Indiana Farmers Union
Inter-tribal Agriculture Council
Kansas Cattlemen's Association
Kiowa County Stockgrower's Association (Colorado)
Lincoln County Stockgrower's Association (Colorado)
Mesa County Cattlemen's (Colorado)
Montana Women Involved in Farm Economics
Michigan Farmers Union
Minnesota Farmers Union
Montana Farmers Union
Montana Cattlemen's Association
National Women Involved in Farm Economics
New Mexico Cattle Growers' Association
North Dakota Farmers Union
Ohio Farmers Union
Pennsylvania Farmers Union
Rocky Mountain Farmers Union
Stevens County Cattlemen (WA)
Spokane County Cattlemen (WA)
South Dakota Women Involved in Farm Economics
Western Organization of Resource Councils