

KCA Issues Statement to USDA

In a recent letter to USDA, Kansas Cattlemen's Association (KCA), with over 1,700 producer members, emphasized the importance of maintaining a healthy U.S livestock herd, continuing to expand export markets for U.S. beef, and sustaining consumer confidence.

As the USDA is considering relaxing import standards with for the Brazilian state of Santa Catarina regionalizing the area and permitting the importation of cattle, swine, beef, and pork, KCA urged the immediate withdraw of the proposal in order to protect the integrity of the U.S. livestock herd and beef supply.

USDA insists that importing live animals and meat from Brazil would be safe. Yet, 2005, the Brazilian state of Mato Grosso do Sul experienced an outbreak of FMD. Exports from that state were halted. However, in 2006 the Brazilian state of Parana had 44 cattle identified as carriers of FMD. Santa Catarina is only two states away from Maso Grosso do Sul. They are separated only by Parana. USDA cannot guarantee that a highly-infectious disease, such as FDM, won't spread into Santa Catarina and end up in the United States.

"For diseases, borders are just imaginary lines. As well, USDA cannot validate how consumers can trust that Brazil will not export beef and cattle into the United States from unsafe zones," KCA contended.

"Regionalization", created by the World Organization for Animal Health, was designed to demonstrate a country's progress to be free of catastrophic diseases such as FMD. Brazil has not made progress in eliminating these types of diseases. According to the OIE, Santa Catarina is the ONLY state in Brazil listed as free of FMD. Brazil is NOT listed as a country free from FMD. Moreover, "regionalization" was not intended to be a marketing tool for a political sector of a country," stated KCA Executive Director Brandy Carter.

KCA addressed the unintended consequences for relaxing trade restrictions with Brazil. By lowering import standards, the U.S. is at risk of losing other trading partners and our export markets. When foreign countries lose confidence that the U.S. is ensuring a safe meat and livestock supply, they quickly shut down their borders. The 2003 BSE case is just one example. By relaxing our trade restrictions and not protecting our livestock beef supply, the U.S. lost markets including Japan, Russia, and China. Although we have gained some foreign markets back, U.S. beef exports have not fully recovered. To date, there are still many markets, including China, that are not open to U.S. beef. This negatively impacts the U.S. cattle industry. A diseased animal imported into the U.S. from Brazil could easily destroy the U.S. export market.

Kansas cattlemen grow a healthy and wholesome product and want to ensure that the USDA does not put policies in place that will jeopardize the confidence that U.S. consumers have in the beef supply. Having an expectation of safe food is reasonable. Importing livestock and beef from Brazil, a country without the same safety standards as the U.S. can jeopardize the U.S. consumers' health and confidence in our beef industry.

USDA has created its proposal at the request of the Brazilian government. Yet, KCA asked the question, "Isn't it the responsibility of the USDA to be accountable to the U.S. economy, the U.S. agricultural industry, and most importantly, the U.S. citizen?"

“The USDA has recently talked about its commitment to preventing diseases while promoting its new traceability system. But easing trade restrictions with a country inundated with FMD and other diseases is a direct contradiction of USDA’s message to the American people. A major FMD outbreak, as a result of importing cattle, will destroy our country’s livestock industry, put U.S. producers out of business, and result in the loss of our consumers’ confidence. The USDA should not take a chance on such a catastrophic outcome by easing imports of live ruminants and beef from any state of Brazil including Santa Catarina,” KCA concluded.