

06/12/2003 Entry: "Producers Have Opportunity to Comment Before Border Reopens"

Billings, MT— An interim rule to include Canada on the list of countries that the USDA considers to be affected with bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) was published in the May 29th edition of the Federal Register. Such designation declares Canada no longer eligible to export cattle, beef, and beef by-products to the United States because of the disease risk. The public has until July 28, 2003, to submit comments on this interim rule.

USDA-Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) rules for restrictions on importation of meat and edible products from ruminants due to BSE further outlines an application process Canada may have to follow for each request for approval to export a particular type of animal or animal product to the U.S.

Should Canada request approval to export cattle or beef products, it would have to file an application for recognition with APHIS. The information Canada would provide proposing export approval would be reviewed by APHIS, then be made available to the public and open for comment. After considering Canada's submission and the public comments received, APHIS would make a final decision on what conditions will be necessary to allow the importation in question.

Canada, eager to regain access to their largest export market, will no doubt apply for recognition soon. R-CALF United Stockgrowers of America (R-CALF USA) and its cattle producer members find APHIS's export approval procedure a positive component of the national BSE surveillance system. The public comment period allows producers and consumers to take an active part in assuring the safety and health of the U.S. food supply and the U.S. cattle herd, as well as providing an opportunity for producers to comment on specific concerns, like the long incubation period of BSE in live cattle.

Such concerns were echoed by Dr. Ulrich Kihm, Director of Safe Food Solutions, former Chief Veterinary Officer of Switzerland, member of the World Animal Health Organization (OIE) Expert Committee on BSE, and team leader of researchers investigating the Canadian BSE case. Said Dr. Kihm regarding the safety of importing live cattle, "Cattle is different because you know you have a long incubation time. So cattle incubating the disease, it goes for four, six, seven, or even longer, years, until [a cow] come[s] down or it may be slaughtered. So cattle, you have to make other assessment for opening borders."

Said R-CALF USA President Leo McDonnell, "R-CALF USA appreciates APHIS's prompt and measured response to the case of BSE in Canada. We remain committed to safeguarding our consumers and our cattle herd and are eager to aid the Agency's prevention and enforcement efforts in any way we can."

The public may comment on the rule adding Canada to the list of regions where BSE exists by sending four copies of your comments to: Docket No. 03-058-1, Regulatory Analysis and Development, PPD, APHIS, Station 3C71, 47000 River Road Unit 118, Riverdale, MD 20737-1238. Or, an e-mail can be sent to geulations@aphis.usda.gov. Comments must be in the body of the e-mail message and not in attached files. Include "Docket No. 03-058-1" in the subject line. Comments must be received by July 28, 2003.

R-CALF USA, the Ranchers-Cattlemen Action Legal Fund, United Stockgrowers of America is a national, non-profit cattle association representing cattle producers in the areas of trade and marketing. R-CALF USA has 8,700 individual members in 43 states and 42 affiliated local and state cattle and farm organizations. For more information, visit www.r-calfusa.com or call 406-252-2516.