

12/24/2003 Entry: "R-CALF USA Requests Specific BSE Mitigation Actions"

R-CALF United Stockgrowers of America

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December 24, 2003 406-252-2516, johnlockie@r-calfusa.com

R-CALF USA Requests Specific BSE Mitigation Actions

(Billings, MT) In a letter to President Bush and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Ann Veneman, on the day of USDA's announcement of a possible finding of BSE in a Washington state dairy cow, R-CALF United Stockgrowers of America (R-CALF USA) President Leo McDonnell requested that the United States "Immediately close the United States border to all imports of live cattle, beef, and both raw and manufactured livestock feed until the circumstances surrounding the suspected case [of BSE] are fully disclosed and understood."

In its letter, R-CALF USA first praised the United States for its foresight in implementing meaningful safeguards to both minimize the risk of introducing Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) in the United States and for making preparations for the possibility that the disease may breach the nation's firewalls. "Unfortunately, the United States may be facing its first case of BSE," the letter stated.

McDonnell explained that the closure of the border is necessary to mitigate both the potential damage the live cattle market might sustain and to maintain consumer confidence in the nation's beef supply following USDA's announcement of the suspected BSE case. R-CALF USA had called an emergency meeting on the day of USDA's announced finding and drafted its letter at the request of United States cow/calf producers, feeders, and livestock auction yard representatives participating in the meeting.

R-CALF USA said the rationale for making the request to close the border was based on the high probability that if BSE were found in the United States, it would most likely have entered through imported ruminants or ruminant products; that the border closure was further needed to maintain the economic viability of the U.S. live cattle industry as it would prevent the build-up of excess supplies of beef and cattle, thus mitigating the potential for price-depressing oversupplies; it would allow the U.S. to rule-out that imported feed was the source of the suspected infection; and that such action would demonstrate that the United States considers the maintenance of a viable cattle industry and the health and safety of consumers a high priority.

McDonnell concluded his letter by stating, “We view this request as an essential step in preserving our domestic market and protecting consumer confidence.”

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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 approximately 9,000 individual members in 46 states and 52 affiliated local and state cattle and farm organizations. For more information, visit www.r-calfusa.com or call 406-252-2516.