

12/28/2003 Entry: "USDA Describes Ear Tag in BSE Cow"

R-CALF United Stockgrowers of America

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R-CALF USA: Day 5: USDA Describes Ear Tag in BSE Cow

(Billings, MT) On day five of the investigation of the Holstein cow infected with Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), Dr. Ron DeHaven, Chief Veterinarian for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), announced that the finding that the BSE infected cow was imported from Canada in 2001 is preliminary. He said the Canadian Food Inspection Agency has indicated that semen from the sire of the infected cow, along with a calf of the infected cow born in Canada has been identified and will be used to perform the DNA tests needed to confirm if the cow originated in Canada.

In response to a reporter's question regarding the kind of ear tag that was in the infected cow's ear, Dr. DeHaven described it as a small, silver colored metal tag that was intended for one-time use with two sides of the tag crimped together. He said the tag itself suggested it had been applied in Canada and was of Canadian origin.

McDonnell said the difficulty in confirming whether or not the infected cow was of foreign origin would not be a problem if USDA and Congress had adopted the cattle industry's recommendation that cattle be de-listed from the so-called J-list that presently exempts cattle from the general requirement of the Tariff Act of 1930 to mark all imported products, including livestock with a mark of origin. "We've been continuously asking USDA and Congress to take this important step so the country of origin of live animals can be readily determined at the point of slaughter," he said.

McDonnell suggested that in the future all factual information related to an investigation such as this should be released to the industry as soon as it is available, even if a final interpretation of the information cannot be confirmed. "This factual information would allow markets to react more responsibly and would prevent the volatility associated with complete uncertainty," he said, adding, "It is difficult to say whether our trading partners would have refrained from closing their borders so quickly if they had known there was a likelihood that the infected cow was imported rather than being a native cow." McDonnell said the distinction between a native case of BSE versus an imported case of BSE is significant under the health safety standards established by the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE).

McDonnell praised USDA's announcement that the United States overall BSE program will now be re-evaluated based on this current case and that appropriate changes will be made either through policy, legislation, and/or rulemaking. However, McDonnell said that USDA should, on its own, cancel its current proposal to re-open the border to Canadian beef products and live cattle. "At the very least, USDA should consider R-CALF USA's standing request to extend the January 5, 2004, comment deadline so the entire industry can focus its resources on this current problem," he suggested. McDonnell said while R-CALF USA and other organizations have requested an extension of time, the USDA is still considering the request.

R-CALF USA had also requested, on December 23, 2003, that the USDA immediately close its borders to the importation of all live cattle, beef, and raw and manufactured feed products until the circumstances surrounding this case are fully understood. "This is a prudent precautionary step the United States should take to ensure that we don't exacerbate this problem by introducing any potentially contaminated products during this investigation," he said. R-CALF USA further requested that the Commodities Future Trading Commission immediately restore the \$1.50 daily price limit on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange until the investigation is complete. "This is a prudent step to ensure the market does not overreact to the limited information surrounding this case, thus protecting the economic viability of our live cattle producers," he concluded.

(30)

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 54 affiliated local and state cattle and farm organizations. For more information, visit www.r-calfusa.com or call 406-252-2516.