

Kansas Cattlemen's Association

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Will New Food Law Deliver Safer Food?

A new law signed by President Obama earlier this week will allow the Food and Drug Administration to mandate food recalls, enforce more regulations, and oversee production agriculture, but will this new law make food safer?

"I heard one Washington D.C. spokesman say that this law is needed because of the numerous cases of food borne illnesses [such as E. coli] in the United States and that this law will increase public health and reduce the amount of health care costs. Food borne illnesses such as E. coli, can often be averted by properly cooking food and proper preparation of fresh meats to avoid cross contamination. This law was named under the guise of food safety. The propaganda used to pass this law led consumers to believe that the food we grow here in the United State is unsafe and that consumers needed legislators to create a new law to make food healthy and safe to eat. This is the furthest thing from the truth. U.S. producers provide the safest most wholesome food in the world. Even if there was intent for safer food, this law does not necessarily provide that," commented Brandy Carter, Executive Director of Kansas Cattlemen's Association.

There are protections intended for smaller farmers, less or modified regulations, but the provisions may not protect most cattle producers. One part of a provision states that direct marketing within the same state or within 275 miles allows for alternative regulations?

"Does one produce a safer product if selling within 275 miles? I do not know. As a producer, I know that I produce the same safe quality product, whether it is going to my neighbor or a stranger in New York. This law will help those small producers, but it will also discourage those same producers from expanding , and when you look at revenue, if you have three generations and five families living off of one operation, you've got to be able to make money to live," Carter continued.

The FDA will have the authority to exempt or modify regulatory requirements for low risk farms. But, what is a low risk farm? And, will the FDA chose to use that authority to exempt those farms. All farms and cattle ranches are not automatically exempt from this law, and the FDA does not have a history of understanding production agriculture or working with the unique circumstances of production agriculture.

This law has a traceability and record keeping requirement attached to it. What does that entail? There is a distinct provision that exempts farmers who sell food directly to consumers or grocery stores. But, how many farmers and ranchers sell their product by direct marketing? At this point, this does not mean you have to tag your calf at birth and that identifier must stay with that animal through its life. But, how will the FDA interpret and regulate traceability?

“It is our concern that there are so many additional regulations and the change of regulatory authority will hinder U.S. food production; it could exacerbate to the point where the U.S. government turns to additional foreign food sources to feed our country. That surely is not making food safety a priority,” Carter concluded.

With this new law, all of these questions will inevitably be answered. At this point, funding has yet to be appropriated for the food safety law. It is expected to cost \$1.4 billion over the first five years.