

JUST HAD TO ASK

Congress takes right step with FMD issue

JUST HAD TO ASK: Tammy Basel, a cattle and sheep producer from Union Center. She also serves on the U.S. Cattlemen's Association Trade Committee and is a member of American Task Force Argentina.

THE QUESTION: Is the Foot and Mouth Disease Prevention Act of 2008 good for state producers?

Trade issues are back in the political spotlight as Congress and the White House continue to tussle over a trade deal with Colombia.

Supporters of the pact say we must bolster Latin American countries like Colombia that oppose Venezuela's American-hating dictator, Hugo Chavez.

Using that same logic, one would assume Administration

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officials would go out of their way to rebuke Chavez sympathizers. But that's not what's happening with Argentina.

In the midst

of serious allegations that Argentina's president accepted \$800,000 in secret campaign contributions from Chavez, the U.S. Department of Agriculture is looking to reward the recently elected leader with an unprecedented trade arrangement.

Under this proposal, select regions of the country would be allowed to ship meat products to America even though Argentina has a checkered history with Foot and Mouth Disease.

We all remember what happened in England when a FMD epidemic swept across its countryside in 2001. Rural economies sputtered as scientists scrambled to get a grasp on the situation. The outcome was a disaster as 6 million animals were destroyed and the livestock industry lost nearly \$20 billion.

This same scene could easily play out on here in the U.S. if our government is not diligent.

If the USDA's regionalized beef trade plan is approved, our only defense from Argentine FMD will be an imaginary border and the hope that Argentina can be trusted to police itself, but Argentina has proven time and time again it is not worthy of that kind of trust.

Worldwide lenders who trusted Argentina are at risk of losing more than \$20 billion in defaulted debt since 2005. It's important to note that this outstanding debt negatively affects many American citizens including retired teachers whose pensions have suffered as a result. And when U.S. trade negotiators went to great lengths to accommodate Argentina and other developing countries in past WTO talks, American farmers were repaid with a litany of expensive trade cases.

Thank goodness, we have trustworthy elected officials in Congress who are willing to take a stand and hold Argentina's feet to the fire.

Last week, the "Foot and Mouth Disease Prevention Act of 2008" was introduced by Senators Tim Johnson, D-S.D., and Mike Enzi, R-Wyo., to block the USDA's half-backed plan and prohibit meat shipments from Argentina until the country can be proven to be FMD-free.

The House equivalent of this bill is being introduced this week by Representatives Stephanie Herseth Sandlin, D-S.D., and Barbara Cubin, R-Wyo.

America's ranchers tip their hats to these legislators for putting the needs of America before the wants of a foreign country with a checkered past. Let's hope the next Administration is taking notes.