



Independent Cattlemen of NEBRASKA

December 12, 2007

Dear Senator Hagel,

I write you today to inform you of a serious concern we have with Argentine beef and urge you to take any means within your power to help Nebraska's cattle industry avert a potentially deadly situation.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is still considering a change to its policies that would allow certain regions of Argentina to ship beef into this country, even though Argentina and its neighbor, Brazil, have problems with Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD).

If FMD infiltrates Nebraska borders, entire herds could be obliterated leaving ranchers in financial ruin. Worse yet, the scare would immediately shut global markets to U.S. beef products, a move that would have a chilling effect on rural economies. For a snapshot of what could happen, a 2001 FMD outbreak in England cost an estimated \$20 billion.

Nebraska's cattlemen are very concerned about this rule because it would be impossible to protect U.S. ranchers from Argentine FMD under the USDA's proposed regionalized system.

This proposal places far too much trust in Argentina—a country with a history of breaking the rules and repeated bad acts against the U.S.—to police itself and ensure no infected cattle passes into “safe” zones.

In its jaded history, Argentina has intentionally turned its back on loans made by U.S. companies (costing the U.S. \$10 billion); sided against U.S. farmers in trade cases; stubbornly refused to open markets or make reforms in the WTO; manipulated its currency and set artificial price controls on ag goods to influence inflation; and gotten increasingly friendly with leftist rulers in South America. They have not earned our trust.

The USDA's plan also dangerously assumes that a deadly disease spread by air would somehow stop at imaginary borders and spare cattle in “safe” regions from infestation.

This threat is real, and Nebraska's ranchers cannot take any chances when it comes to FMD, a disease that the American Veterinary Association calls the most economically devastating of all livestock diseases.

Please contact the USDA to voice your strong opposition to regionalized trade proposal and let them know that Argentina cannot be trusted. When it comes to FMD, our top priority must be to strengthen our country's protections, not to invite trouble in.

Sincerely,
Chris Abbott
President – Independent Cattlemen of Nebraska