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U.S. Cattlemen Oppose Plan To Regionalize Beef Trade With Argentina

For more information: Abra Belke (202) 725-4600

E-mail contact: press@uscattlemen.org

San Lucas, Calif. (June 20) - In a letter sent June 19 to the Senate Finance Committee, the U.S. Cattlemen's Association (USCA) made it clear that opposing regionalization of Argentina related to animal health disease issues for import purposes is one of the organization's "top member-driven policy issues."

USCA urged Senator Max Baucus (D-MT), Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee to "strongly oppose any attempt to weaken oversight or regulation of trade with Argentina."

Despite widespread problems with foot and mouth disease (FMD), a highly contagious infection that can destroy entire cattle herds, Argentina has proposed a plan to export beef to the United States from certain regions.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is currently considering adoption of the proposal to relax restrictions on Argentine beef from some areas by regionalizing trade areas.

The U.S. Cattlemen's Association is deeply concerned that proper enforcement of regionalized trade would be impossible and that these regions would become gateways for beef from non-approved areas of Argentina and Brazil. Brazil also has FMD issues.

"How can Argentina be trusted to ensure this catastrophic disease would not enter the United States through one of those gateways," asked Jon Wooster, a San Lucas, California rancher and USCA President.

"Argentina has proven time and time again that it cannot be trusted to live up to its promises," said Wooster. "This is a nation that heavily subsidizes its agricultural industries and routinely defaults on international loans."

In its June 19 letter USCA informed the Senate Finance Committee that it had recently passed policy on the matter. The resolution reads:

Whereas, the health of the U.S. cattle herd is vital to the profitability of independent cattle producers; and whereas, APHIS/USDA has proposed to declare regions of foreign countries with animal disease problems as "disease free"; be it resolved, that the U.S. Cattlemen's Association opposes efforts by the government of the United States to allow regionalization of foreign countries with animal disease problems if such regionalization weakens animal health or food safety standards concerning importation of cattle or beef into the United States.

"This policy addresses USDA's intent to liberalize health and safety standards, and it is aimed at driving home the message to USDA that U.S. ranchers are unrelenting in their effort to protect the health of the domestic herd and that we expect the agency to carry out that mission," noted Wooster.

Established in March 2007, USCA is committed to assembling a team to concentrate efforts in Washington D.C. to enhance and expand the cattle industry's voice on Capitol Hill. For membership forms and other information visit www.uscattlemen.org.