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J. Patrick Boyle
President and C.E.O.

February 26, 2004

The Honorable Ann Veneman
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
14th Street and Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

35-4241356
APHIS

Dear Secretary Veneman:

We are writing to urge you to use the full range of your authority immediately to reestablish trade in cattle, beef and beef products produced in BSE minimal risk countries like Canada. In our view, the full restoration of trade access from Canada to the United States is an essential pre-condition for the American cattle and beef industry to regain reciprocal market access within North America, especially in Mexico, and ultimately to other major foreign markets.

The U. S. Department of Agriculture has the authority to make this happen now. We call upon you to take the critical first step that can set a global process in motion: lead the international community in rational BSE policies by bringing American policies into conformance with those set by the Office of International Epizootics (OIE). Under OIE guidelines, cattle and beef trade between the U.S. and Canada is permitted. Indeed, the existing limitations on Canadian beef imports to the U.S. are without a foundation in science as is the continuing prohibition on Canadian cattle imports.

Recently, the International Review Team, which you requested through the Foreign Animal Disease Advisory Committee, acknowledged the importance of taking this action when it said in its report, that the "U.S. should demonstrate leadership in trade matters by adopting import/export policies in accordance with international standards, and thus encourage the discontinuation of irrational trade barriers..."

Madame Secretary, you and your colleagues at USDA and throughout the Bush Administration have devoted considerable effort to re-opening export markets, such as Japan and Mexico. Unfortunately, those very time-consuming efforts have not achieved desired results thus far. In the last two months, the U.S. cattle industry and beef-packing sector have incurred substantial equity and job reductions. Continuation of the status quo will only exacerbate these economic dislocations and may force long-term structural downsizing in the industry, which stands to harm the U.S. agricultural economy as a whole.

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Although we appreciate the government's determination in seeking to restore U.S. beef exports, we also share your growing frustration over the unscientific requirements being sought by some foreign governments. Calls for testing all cattle for BSE are not supported by the scientific facts. Likewise, requests for removal of additional SRMs is not supported by scientific facts or required under international standards. Notably, Dr. Hideaki Karaki, the Tokyo University Professor Emeritus and Chairman of the Japan Science Conference recently said, "The scientific fact is the meat is safe because SRMs are removed. Testing is not related to safety."

Although equally disappointing we are not necessarily surprised that some governments are inclined to restore limited trade with America only if USDA can certify that U.S. packers are meeting the same non-scientific standards that we currently require of Canada. There is a terrible irony in the fact that U.S. requirements imposed on Canada in 2003 are the very precedents preventing U.S. beef exports to Mexico today.

A point that needs to be made abundantly clear to our international trading partners is that all known potentially infectious tissues -- so-called specified risk materials (SRM) -- have been removed from the food supply in both Canada and the U.S. Furthermore, the higher risk non-ambulatory cattle are not permitted to enter the food supply in either country. Moreover, increased cattle testing in both Canada and the U.S., as part of an even more robust surveillance system, will help maintain animal health.

Yet, until the United States exhibits leadership by reopening the Canadian border to cattle and beef and beef products in a manner that conforms with OIE standards, it is unrealistic to expect that other countries will afford any similar access opportunities for American ranchers and processors. We strongly believe that the time for incremental half-measures, which fall far short of existing OIE norms and scientific rationale, has long since passed. Similarly, the process of convincing foreign governments to be the first to abide by OIE standards will be a long time coming.

We believe such an effort must begin in Washington, D.C. Restoring cattle and beef trade in North America is a critical first step to preventing further equity loss in the industry and minimizing the prospects of further job losses in the industry. The leadership in the industry will join you as you deem appropriate to support you in these efforts.

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The U.S. has the authority and the credibility to lead the way in establishing a rational BSE trade policy. We urge you to take this critical first step immediately.

Sincerely,



J. Patrick Boyle

Cc: Secretary Tommy Thompson, HHS
Ambassador Robert Zoellick, USTR
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Under Secretary Bill Hawks
Under Secretary Elsa Murano
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