

May 14, 2014

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

As organizations that represent farmers and ranchers, we respectfully request that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) reconsider the proposal to relax restrictions on imports of animal products from Brazil. Many of our organizations submitted comments in opposition to the draft rule changes that would allow the importation of livestock products from a region in Brazil, and several of our members testified to that effect during a hearing of the U.S. House of Representatives Agriculture Subcommittee on Livestock, Rural Development and Credit on April 30. Recent revelations about the state of livestock health and food safety standards in Brazil raise additional concerns about loosening restrictions on imports.

Our members are directly engaged in livestock production of all kinds and scales. The health and integrity of animal agriculture is extraordinarily important to rural America and to the U.S. economy as a whole. Any threats to this industry deserve thorough investigation, and the events in Brazil warrant close scrutiny by the USDA before further advancing.

Brazil has long been affected by foot and mouth disease among livestock, although news broke this week that another contagious animal disease, bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), has been confirmed in the country. More troubling is the fact that this case was found in Mato Grosso, a state in the region of Brazil that is the subject of the proposal to relax restrictions on Brazilian exports of animal products to the United States. When BSE was first identified in the United States in December 2003, 65 of our trading partners eventually imposed partial or full bans on U.S. beef. According to a Kansas State University study, the U.S. beef industry lost between \$2.9 billion and \$4.2 billion in 2004 alone because of BSE. Rural America should not again be subjected to severe losses simply because of lax standards for animal imports.

Furthermore, USDA recently released correspondence with Brazilian food safety regulators about the country's meat inspection system. USDA conducted an audit in early 2013, which found concerns about Brazil's ability to evaluate food safety procedures. The report concluded that USDA "will not certify any new establishments as eligible to export to the U.S." In subsequent letters, the Brazilian regulators noted they have started to consider changes to standards and enforcement, but have not put these steps fully into effect. These materials were released without time for adequate review before the April 22 deadline for comments on the proposed relaxation on animal product imports from Brazil.

Family farmers and ranchers would suffer tremendously if an animal disease outbreak were to occur in the United States, both from the loss of livestock as well as from consumers' loss of confidence in our food safety and animal health systems. We look forward to working with USDA to ensure that our livestock industry remains strong and urge you to reconsider the proposal rule on Brazilian animal product imports.

Sincerely,

National Farmers Union
United States Cattlemen's Association

cc:

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry

The Honorable Frank Lucas
Chairman
U.S. House Committee on Agriculture

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member
U.S. House Committee on Agriculture