



March 9, 2007

Docket No. APHIS 2006-0041  
Regulatory Analysis and Development, PPD, APHIS  
Station 3A-03.8  
4700 River Road Unit 118  
Riverdale, MD 20737-1238

Re: Docket No. APHIS 2006-0041

Dear Sir/Madame:

On behalf of the family farm and ranch members of the National Farmers Union (NFU), I am writing to respond to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) request for comments on review of the proposed rule on bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) minimal-risk regions and the importation of live bovines and products derived from bovines. NFU strongly opposes the proposed rule to expand beef and cattle trade with Canada and urges USDA to withdraw the rule. American cattle producers and consumers deserve better than what was proposed in the January 9, 2007, *Federal Register*.

Thirty days after USDA published the proposed rule to expand beef and cattle trade with Canada, a ninth BSE-positive case was confirmed by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. The bull found in Alberta, was born in 2000, well after Canada implemented its 1997 ruminant feed ban and well beyond the March 1, 1999, date proposed age limit in the rule. The latest BSE discovery is Canada's ninth discovery since 2003, four of which were found to be born after March 1, 1999. Relaxing import standards while Canada continues to discover BSE-positive animals will do nothing to stem the tide of potentially infected cattle and beef products into the U.S.

Expanding beef and cattle trade with Canada, by allowing cattle older than 30 months and beef from any aged animal to enter the United States, is not a policy that has any benefit to U.S. cattle producers, American consumers or our unstable international export market relationships. The current import restrictions dictate that cattle and beef can only be imported from Canada if the animals are younger than 30 months. It is important to the future of the U.S. cattle industry for the current rule to be upheld. American farmers and ranchers have worked together to protect the U.S. beef supply and provide consumers with confidence the beef products they purchase are safe and healthy. Transferring Canada's BSE problem to the U.S. will not benefit cattle producers or consumers. NFU encourages the USDA to protect the U.S. cattle industry's future and not jeopardize our volatile international export market relationships by permitting the importation of additional Canadian cattle and beef products.

After Canadian cattle and beef imports were banned from the U.S. in 2003, with the initial discovery of BSE within the Canadian cattle herd, our neighbors to the north expanded its herd. If Canada is granted increased access to American markets it will undoubtedly take advantage of that opportunity and increase exports. Any increase in beef and cattle imports to the U.S. will have a negative economic impact on America's farmers and ranchers. As a result of Canada's expanded cattle and beef supply, the price of Canadian beef is well below that of American beef. It is imperative any economic disadvantages born by American cattle producers be compensated if import restrictions are lifted. American farmers and ranchers need a safety-net to assist in the event of a market collapse. NFU urges USDA to establish an economic safety-net to protect those who would be impacted if imports from Canada are expanded.

Mandatory country-of-origin labeling (COOL) was passed by Congress in 2002, but has never been implemented on meat products. NFU has long supported mandatory COOL and worked for its implementation in order for American producers to have the ability to differentiate our high-quality beef for consumers, who have the right to know the source of their food. Informed consumers can make informed choices, and COOL provides necessary information to the public. If the supply of U.S. beef contains meat from Canadian cattle born after March 1, 1999, it is crucial that consumers know the origin of the products they buy. Only by implementing and enforcing COOL will consumers be able to make important choices to protect their health and the health of their families. NFU calls upon USDA to immediately implement mandatory COOL and give consumers the choice to buy American beef.

National Farmers Union recommends the following concerns be addressed prior to expanding beef and cattle trade with Canada:

- Canada can prove and verify its cattle herd and beef products are BSE-free;
- Canada can prove and verify 100 percent compliance with its ruminant feed ban;
- U.S. international beef export markets are firmly reestablished;
- Mandatory country-of-origin labeling is fully implemented;
- Rapid- test technology is provided to all U.S. slaughtering facilities to provide stability to the cattle market, and another layer of confidence for the American consuming public; and
- A guaranteed economic safety net for American producers if the importation of cattle and beef products from BSE-positive countries negatively impacts domestic profitability.

Additional steps to be satisfied before expanding live cattle trade with Canada:

- Increase level of surveillance, quarantine, inspection and testing at all U.S – Canadian border locations where suspect animals and other disease vectors may be determined;
- Expand surveillance, testing and prevention efforts in the U.S.; and
- Impose similar guarantees concerning livestock feed production from all trading partners and require them to allow the U.S. to perform random investigations and testing of their production facilities as a condition of market access.

National Farmers Union strongly opposes the proposed rule and urges USDA to withdraw its proposed rule until the above conditions are met.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Buis". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "T" and "B".

Tom Buis, President  
National Farmers Union