



December 14, 2007

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman, Senate Agriculture Committee
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Saxby Chambliss
Ranking Member, Senate Agriculture Committee
416 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Chambliss:

On behalf of the family farmers and ranchers of National Farmers Union (NFU), we write to express concern over possible imports of Argentine ruminants and ruminant products into the United States. We urge you to investigate this matter further and ensure all necessary protective measures are employed before any such action would occur.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) published a proposed rule in January 2007 that would allow certain regions of Argentina to ship cattle, sheep, goats and meat products into the United States, despite the documented history of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) in Argentine livestock herds. To open the border to imports of Argentine ruminants and products is to risk the exposure of American livestock herds to this devastating disease.

FMD is a highly infectious virus which, if introduced into the United States, could contaminate entire herds and leave producers in financial ruin, as infected herds must be culled to prevent the spread of the disease. FMD is so virulent that the American Veterinary Medical Association considers it to be the most economically devastating of all livestock diseases. The United States suffered nine outbreaks of FMD in the early twentieth century but has been FMD-free since 1929. According to USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, the economic impacts of a re-occurrence of FMD in the United States could cost the economy billions of dollars in the first year.

Office of Management and Budget (OMB) estimates show this change in policy would result in increased imports of Argentine ruminants and ruminant products, lowering the price of American products. Given the risk of introducing FMD into U.S. herds and the economic cost to American producers, this policy change would be detrimental to U.S. agriculture.

FMD presents a very real threat to American agriculture and its introduction into the United States must be prevented. Opening our borders to Argentine ruminants and ruminant products is a risk that American producers simply cannot afford. Congressional oversight is needed to ensure that harmful products are not allowed into the United States. It would be prudent of the Senate Agriculture Committee to further investigate the impact that such imports could have on the agriculture industry before U.S. borders are opened to Argentine ruminants and products. We urge you to consider this issue in Committee and engage with USDA to express to them the dangers of proceeding with this proposed rule. Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

National Farmers Union Board of Directors