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## **GIPSA proposals cause much ado about an email**

By Rita Jane Gabbett

In an example of just how polarizing the USDA's proposed changes to livestock marketing rules have become, five Senators pounced on an email one employee in the Colorado office of USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service sent to two other people, charging it was an example of USDA bias on the issue of livestock marketing reform.

The employee had forwarded from his USDA email account a letter that R-CALF USA (Ranchers-Cattlemen Action Legal Fund, United Stockgrowers of America) had issued. The R-CALF letter encouraged livestock producers to attend the meeting USDA and the Department of Justice are hosting in Fort Collins, Colo. today on competition in the livestock industry.

R-CALF supports the changes USDA's Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration has proposed, while many other industry groups oppose them. (See [GIPSA livestock marketing rules to take center stage in Colorado](#) on Meatingplace Aug. 26, 2010.)

In a letter to Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, Senators Pat Roberts (R-Kans.), Saxby Chambliss (R-Ga.), **Mike Johanns (R-Neb.)**, Sam Brownback (R-Kan.), and Tom Coburn (R-Okla.) said the email "raises serious concerns about the objectivity of your department." They also requested information on where the email was sent and questioned whether USDA asked employees to help solicit participants for the Colorado meeting.

A USDA spokesman, however, said the errant email was the act of a single employee.

"The employee's intent was to share information with others who might want to attend a meeting where the Secretary was present," USDA spokesman Caleb Weaver told **Meatingplace**. "He forwarded the message to one NRCS staff member and one member of the Colorado Association of Conservation Districts - the vice president. The employee had no intent to support or advocate for R-CALF."

Nonetheless, Weaver said, forwarding such material is against NRCS policy.

"NRCS headquarters is working with its Colorado state office and this employee to ensure such an event does not occur again. In addition, NRCS will issue a national bulletin to remind employees of the policy governing the forwarding of emails that originate from advocacy groups and underscore the importance of adhering to it," said Weaver.

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