

Fighting for the U.S. Cattle Producer!



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April 13, 2011

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

In one fell swoop, the Obama Administration is poised to clinch the prize that eluded the Bush Administration for four years – that prize is the denigration of the United States cattle industry's iconic, centuries-old, hot-iron brand. It is apparent the prize's sponsor, the World Trade Organization, has successfully persuaded the Obama Administration to denigrate America's hot-iron brand to not only make room for the internationally numbered ear tag, but also to elevate that tag to an exclusive category. So exclusive is the category that it bumped out America's centuries-old brand to get there.

Thanks to the Obama Administration, in the United States of America the only universally accepted means of identifying domestic cattle, or foreign cattle imported into the United States, will be with an ear tag. The far superior, time proven and more permanent means of identifying livestock – the centuries-old hot-iron brand – is history unless some old cowboy can, with hat in hand, persuade the governments in surrounding states to nevertheless accept his now demoted brand as an official animal identification device or method.

We, the undersigned officers, directors and committee chairs of R-CALF USA, cannot believe that you are following through with this threat.

If you are, then you and your agency outright lied to us. R-CALF USA relied exclusively on your word when it ceased its opposition to your agency's development of a mandatory, national animal identification system. Your word included a written promise that hot-iron brands would remain on the list of official identification devices. Specifically, in February 2010 you, through your agency, wrote:

The details of the new system will be developed in a transparent and collaborative process. USDA will maintain a list of official identification devices, which can be updated or expanded based on the needs of the States and Tribal Nations. There are many official identification options available, such as branding, metal tags, RFID, just to name a few. (APHIS Factsheet, February 2010)

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This was your word – your promise – that brands would remain on the list of official identification devices under your new animal disease traceability framework. You gave no indication whatsoever that any devices or methods would be removed from this list; only an indication that the list may be updated or expanded, which has the customary meaning that additional devices or methods may be added to the list of official identification devices.

Relegating the hot-iron brand to a secondary position behind the international ear tag has nothing to do with animal health, and everything to do with capitulating to a global agenda under the auspices of the World Trade Organization, Codex Alimentarius, and the World Organization for Animal Health. Europe does not rely on brands so the United States must not either? It is becoming increasingly apparent that no one was listening during the nationwide series of listening sessions your agency held on this subject.

Please clarify whether you intend, through your proposed rule concerning your new animal disease traceability framework (proposed rule), to remove brands from the list of official animal identification devices or methods – devices or methods that are, today, universally accepted, without the need for any compensatory, government fiat from other states. If this is your intent, and if there is language in the proposed rule to demote the brand in any way, then we implore you to immediately revoke your proposed rule and indefinitely postpone its publication in the *Federal Register*. Do not be the Administration that decommissions America's hot-iron brand.

Sincerely,



George Chambers, President and Region IX
Director
Carrollton, Georgia



Joel Gill, Vice President and Region XII
Director
Pickens, Mississippi



Maxine Korman, Region I Director
Hinsdale, Montana



Dr. Taylor Haynes, Region II Director
Cheyenne, Wyoming



Johnny Smith, Region III Director
Fort Pierre, South Dakota



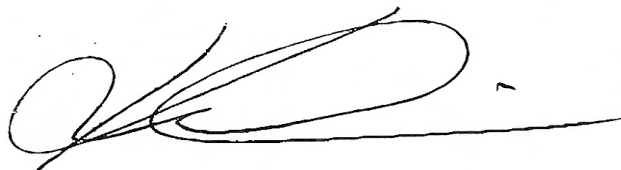
Carl Johnson, Region IV Director
Tatum, New Mexico



Stayton Weldon, Region V Director
Cuero, Texas



Max Thornsberry, D.V.M., Region VI
Director
Richland, Missouri



Kevin Kirschbaum, Region VII Director
Bloomington, Wisconsin



Darol Dickinson, Region VIII Director
Barnesville, Ohio



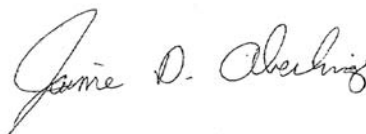
James McCuen, Region X Director
Okanogan, Washington



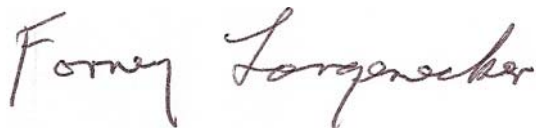
Jerry Long, D.V.M., Region XI Director
Live Oak, California



Alan Pruitt, Region XIII Director
Hickory, North Carolina



Jaime Oberling, Region XIV Director
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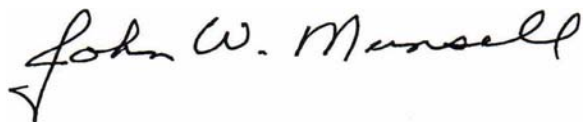
Forney Longenecker, Region XV Director
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Dennis Thornsberry, Marketing Committee
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Crocker, Missouri



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Belvidere, South Dakota



John Munsell, HACCP Committee Chair
Miles City, Montana

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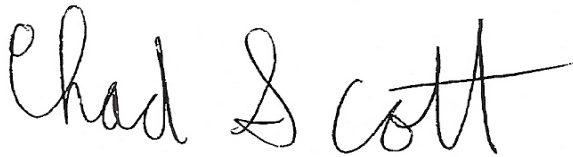
Reed Kelley, Trade Committee Chair
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Craig Shaver, Private Property Rights
Committee Co-Chair
Sturgis, South Dakota



Mike Shultz, COOL Committee Chair
Brewster, Kansas



Chad Scott, Private Property Rights
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Bill Bullard, Secretary and CEO
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