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December 23, 2003

President George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

The Honorable Ann Veneman
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250

Sent via e-mail and facsimile

Re: Request by United States Cattle Industry to Mitigate Potential Impacts of Suspected BSE Case

Dear President Bush and Secretary Veneman:

The United States live cattle industry and American consumers are fortunate that the United States had the foresight to implement meaningful safeguards to not only minimize the introduction of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) and Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) in the United States cattle herd, but also, to prepare for the possibility that one of these diseases may breach our firewalls.

Unfortunately, the United States may be facing its first case of BSE. While we cannot immediately determine if this suspect case originated in a domestic or imported animal, if the latter proves true, the United States will be insulated from a reduced BSE risk rating by the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE). Nevertheless, we are concerned that news of this suspect case may adversely impact the United States live cattle market.

On behalf of the nearly 9000 voluntary members of R-CALF United Stockgrowers of America (R-CALF USA), along with its 54 affiliated local and state cattle associations, representing thousands more producers, we respectfully request that you take the following steps to mitigate the potential damage to the

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United States live cattle market and to maintain consumer confidence in our domestic beef supply:

Immediately close the United States border to all imports of live cattle, beef, and both raw and manufactured livestock feed until the circumstances surrounding this suspected case are fully disclosed and understood.

This request was formulated during an emergency meeting called by R-CALF USA moments ago that included cow/calf producers, cattle feeders, and livestock auction yard owners from throughout the United States. The rationale for the requested action includes the fact that due to the United States' implementation of effective BSE risk mitigation measures in the early and mid 90s, there is a high probability that if BSE is confirmed in the United States, the BSE agent would most likely be introduced via imported ruminants or ruminant products. Second, given the potential for BSE to destroy the economic viability of a nation's cattle industry, the curtailment of excess supplies of imported beef and live cattle prior to the completion of a scientific investigation will prevent a market collapse as was experienced by United Kingdom and Canadian producers. Third, if the cow in question is a domestic cow, determining how the cow contracted the disease, of course, will be of paramount importance. The probability is that the feed consumed by the cow was in part imported. Until we rule out that possibility all imported feeds should be curtailed. Fourth, such precautionary steps will demonstrate that the maintenance of an economically viable cattle industry and the ongoing protection of our consumers' health and safety are priorities of the United States.

We pledge our support in your ongoing efforts to confirm whether we are dealing with the first case of BSE in the United States, to determine the origin of the index cow, to determine the cause of infection, and to work diligently to maintain consumer confidence in the safety of our domestic beef supply. We view this request as an essential step in preserving our domestic market and protecting consumer confidence.

Thank you for your consideration of this important request.

Sincerely,



Leo R. McDonnell, Jr.
President

Cc: Members of Congress