



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

AUG 9 2006

Mr. Chuck Kiker
President
R-CALF USA
Post Office Box 30715
Billings, Montana 59107

Dear Mr. Kiker:

Thank you for your letter of July 17, 2006, to Secretary Johanns concerning, among other things, Canada's recent case of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) and its possible effects on U.S. cattle and beef trade.

We recognize your organization's concerns and appreciate the opportunity to respond. As you may know, the Department of Agriculture (USDA) sent an epidemiologist to assist in the BSE investigation in Canada. Our participation in the investigation, which our Canadian counterparts have welcomed, will help us to thoroughly understand the circumstances involved in this case. The investigation will, among other things, focus on determining how the infected 50-month-old animal was exposed to the BSE agent. USDA officials will of course evaluate all the information related to the case before deciding what, if any, action should be taken. While the investigation is under way, we have suspended rulemaking on the importation of Canadian cattle over 30 months of age.

We share your belief that strong, science-based import standards protect animal health, increase consumer safety, and promote fair trade policies. Our import regulations and policies are in fact grounded in science and are in accordance with BSE guidelines established by the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE). The OIE guidelines are developed by animal health experts and are adopted and supported by the veterinary authorities of the OIE member countries. These guidelines are also the international standards for trade as recognized by the World Trade Organization. The BSE guidelines allow countries to manage the human and animal health risks associated with the presence of the BSE agent in cattle and to safely trade ruminants and ruminant products. We strongly believe that developing science-based trade policy consistent with these international standards will, over the long term, greatly benefit the United States as well as our trading partners. Given our firm belief that current barriers against U.S. beef are scientifically unwarranted, we are continuing to work diligently, at the highest levels, to reopen export markets that remain closed to U.S. producers.

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We assure you that USDA officials will carefully review the results of the epidemiological investigation in Canada. We will also continue to base our trade and regulatory decisions on scientific principles—in accordance with internationally accepted OIE guidelines—and we will actively work with our trading partners to convince those countries to do the same.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Charles D. Lambert". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Chuck Lambert
Deputy Under Secretary
Marketing and Regulatory Programs