



April 16, 2007

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

**Sent via facsimile, e-mail, and U.S. mail**

**Re: Inquiry Concerning Adequacy of Bovine Tuberculosis Mitigation Measures**

Dear Secretary Johanns,

The R-CALF USA Animal Health Committee was informed of recent testimony presented to Congress by Phyllis K. Fong, Inspector General, United States Department of Agriculture Office of Inspector General. Inspector General Fong indicated that the success of the Bovine Tuberculosis Eradication Program administered by the Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) was hampered by weaknesses in program oversight that made it difficult for the agency to timely detect and eradicate the disease. She stated that APHIS' status system did not capture most Bovine Tuberculosis (Bovine TB) cases and, further:

Approximately 75 percent of the TB-infected cattle detected through slaughter surveillance originate in Mexico, and these animals spent months at U.S. farms and feedlots with no restrictions to prevent commingling with domestic cattle.<sup>1</sup>

In a September 2006 Audit Report, the Office of Inspector General stated:

Although the majority of TB-infected cattle found by slaughter surveillance in the United States are from Mexico, APHIS has not developed controls to restrict the movement of cattle, or require additional testing to compensate for the disease's incubation period. Until additional controls are added, APHIS cannot reasonably expect to achieve its goal and eradicate TB when it is being imported into the United States each year.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Statement of the Honorable Phyllis K. Fong, Inspector General, before the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies, Committee on Appropriations, U.S. House of Representatives, March 1, 2007, at 9.

<sup>2</sup> Audit Report, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's Control Over the Bovine Tuberculosis Eradication Program, Office of Inspector General, Report No. 50601-0009-Ch, September 2006, at 19.

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This information suggests that APHIS has not adequately protected the U.S. cattle herd from the introduction of Bovine TB from Mexico. This is particularly disturbing given the knowledge that the incidence of Bovine TB in Mexico is significantly higher than in the United States. For example, the OIG stated that Mexico reported over 2,000 TB-infected cattle herds in 2004, while the U.S. reported only 10 positive herds.<sup>3</sup>

Bovine TB is a contagious disease that can affect most mammals, including humans. The detection of this disease in the United States results in significant financial losses to affected U.S. cattle herds as well as to all cattle herds residing in an affected state, principally due to the imposition of animal-movement restrictions. Several states including Texas, California, New Mexico, Michigan, Minnesota, South Dakota, and Colorado have detected Bovine TB within their borders in recent years.

R-CALF USA is pleased to learn from news reports that APHIS will now suspend imports from the Mexico state of Coahuila beginning April 17, 2007, as a result of ongoing TB concerns. However, R-CALF USA does not understand why APHIS has delayed taking swift and decisive action to protect the U.S. cattle industry from the continual reintroduction of Bovine TB from Mexico – a condition detrimental to the health and welfare of the U.S. cattle industry. We are also concerned that this action against only the state of Coahuila may not be sufficient to achieve a necessary level of protection.

On behalf of the 15,000 members of R-CALF USA, we respectfully request that you explain why USDA has not taken more decisive action to protect our U.S. cattle herds from a known source of Bovine TB; whether the USDA is following even minimal international standards established by the OIE for preventing the spread of Bovine TB; and whether USDA has specific plans to begin providing the U.S. cattle industry with needed protection.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "R. M. Thornsberry" followed by a stylized flourish.

R.M. Thornsberry, D.V.M.

President, R-CALF USA Board of Directors

Cc: Under Secretary Bruce Knight  
U.S. Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman Tom Harkin  
U.S. House Agriculture Committee Chairman Collin Peterson

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*