

Fighting for the U.S. Cattle Producer!



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December 21, 2010

The Honorable Janet Napolitano
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Sent Via Facsimile (202-282-8401); Original Via U.S. Mail

Re: Scientific Findings by the National Academy of Sciences and New Empirical Evidence of Recurrence of Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD) in South Korea Demonstrate Unacceptable Risk Regarding the Placement of the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility (NBAF) in Manhattan, Kansas; Request for Voluntary Abandonment by DHS.

Dear Secretary Napolitano:

The scientific report issued by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) on Nov. 15, 2010, found serious shortcomings in the Department of Homeland Security's (Department's) site-specific biosafety and biosecurity risk assessment (SSRA) for the proposed National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility (NBAF). Particularly, and perplexingly, NAS found that the Department's SSRA did not account for the overall risks associated with operating the NBAF and conducting foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) work at the Department's chosen site – Manhattan, Kansas. The NAS specifically found the Department's conclusion invalid that the risk of FMD-infection at the Manhattan, Kansas, site is very low relative to the risk of infection introduced from an external source.

Of special concern to U.S. cattle producers is the NAS' finding that your Department had inadequately evaluated the risk of working with FMD in large animals, along with NAS' findings that the Department's conclusions regarding its ability to contain an inadvertent release of FMD were not realistic. The Department's conclusions were, according to NAS, based on flawed epidemiological estimates, a failure to describe how Homeland Security could rapidly detect a release, and a failure to realistically demonstrate how federal and local officials would effectively respond to and control an FMD release.

Analogous to those findings is the recurrence of FMD in South Korea detected on Nov. 26, 2010, just two months *after* the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) declared South Korea free of the disease. The South Korean experience provides empirical evidence that the pernicious FMD virus can readily overcome optimal veterinary and regulatory infrastructures, biosecurity measures, emergency response plans, and even demonstrable evidence that officials

The Honorable Janet Napolitano

December 21, 2010

Page 2

can take appropriate action in case of an FMD outbreak. As you will recall from my earlier letter to you dated May 3, 2010, the U.S. Department of Agriculture purported to have scientific evidence to conclude that South Korea possessed each of those favorable characteristics. But, those characteristics proved incapable of preventing serious harm from South Korea's two separate and widespread FMD outbreaks in 2010.

According to the OIE, South Korea destroyed 1,875 head of cattle and 27,970 hogs between November 26 and December 15 in an attempt to control its continuing outbreak. *The Korea Times* reported on December 20 that South Korea had destroyed 199,177 livestock as part of its FMD eradication efforts so far this year. To put this loss into perspective, if Kansas – which has about 30,000 cattle operations with a total inventory of about 6 million cattle and calves – were to suffer an FMD outbreak and 199,177 cattle had to be destroyed, this level of animal depopulation would wipe out the entire inventories of 995 Kansas cattle producers.

Clearly, the Department's own findings that there is a 70 percent chance FMD would be released and would result in infection outside the laboratory with an economic impact of \$9 billion to \$50 billion, and the NAS' characterization of such risk as one that is more likely than not to occur within the 50-year lifespan of the NBAF, suggest that this risk is absolutely unacceptable. We should learn from South Korea's experience, not attempt to repeat it.

On behalf of the thousands of cattle-producing members of R-CALF USA, I implore you to take the immediate action of voluntarily denouncing the NBAF project proposed in Manhattan, Kansas. Your agency, and this Administration, now has ample scientific evidence to suggest that if you do not voluntarily abandon this irresponsible proposal, you will, more likely than not, go down in history as being responsible for reintroducing the FMD virus to U.S. livestock after it had been completely eradicated from the mainland in 1929.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "R. M. Thornsberry".

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

Cc: Dr. Tara O'Toole, Under Secretary for the Science and Technology for the Science and Technology Directorate, U.S. Department of Homeland Security
The Honorable Tom Vilsack, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture
The Honorable Jon Tester, U.S. Senate