

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 20, 2008

The Honorable Ed Schafer
Secretary of Agriculture
200-A Jamie L. Whitten Building
Washington, D.C. 20250

Secretary Schafer:

The Foot and Mouth Disease Prevention Act of 2008 was introduced in response to the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) plan to regionalize Argentina for Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD). We write today to reiterate our commitment to this bipartisan legislation and our objection to the Department's proposal.

The United States, as you well know, has been free of FMD without vaccination since 1929. Given the highly infectious nature of this airborne disease among ruminant species, we wish to emphasize the importance of avoiding disease transmission to our domestic herds. We believe that the Department of Agriculture's Patagonia proposal will only serve to place our domestic herds at undue risk for the possible introduction of FMD. We urge the U.S. Department of Agriculture to permanently abandon its Patagonia proposal.

We agree sound science must be the basis for initiatives involving or affecting livestock health. We also believe that, in consultation with nationally recognized livestock health experts, sound science determines that we not regionalize Argentina for FMD. APHIS has adopted a regionalization protocol that is compliant with the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE). That protocol involves 11 factors which must be addressed by the country seeking to regionalize when the regionalization process is initiated. However, out of the 11 points listed, Argentina is arguably deficient on two critical points, involving both the degree to which the region is separated from other regions of greater risk and the level of control in moving both product and animals from higher risk areas.

On November 12, 2008, our staff met with Dr. John Clifford, USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services (APHIS) Deputy Administrator. Dr. Clifford discussed in that meeting his intention not to move forward with the Argentina proposal until a USDA technical team was sent to Patagonia to review the risk assessment released in 2005. We are encouraged by Dr. Clifford's remarks regarding the Patagonia proposal; however, we also wish to underscore the risk associated with this proposal for America's farmers and ranchers while the country of Argentina, as a whole, still struggles with FMD.

The Foot and Mouth Disease Prevention Act of 2008 maintains wide organizational support. The National Association of State Departments of Agriculture, U.S. Cattlemen's Association, American Sheep Industry Association, R-CALF, National Farmers Union, South Dakota Stockgrowers Association, South Dakota Livestock Auction Markets Association, South Dakota Cattlemen's Association, Wyoming Stock Growers Association, Western Organization of Resource Councils, and

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Dakota Rural Action are some of the groups which support our legislation. A poll was also taken within the National Assembly of State Animal Health Officials (NASAHO), and the majority of veterinarians within NASAHO are opposed to the Department's plan.

The United States Department of Agriculture, now and in the future, must prioritize the health of our domestic livestock herd to ensure our national food security remains intact. We urge the Department to abandon its plan to regionalize Argentina for FMD, and thank you in advance for your prompt attention to this important request.

Sincerely,



Tim Johnson
United States Senator



Mike Enzi
United States Senator