



Committee On Finance

Max Baucus, Ranking Member

NEWS RELEASE

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Baucus Requests Appointment of "Special Envoy" to Reopen Int'l Borders to U.S. Beef

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) In order to help protect America's beef market in the wake of the recent discovery of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) in a single dairy cow late last month, U.S. Senator Max Baucus recently contacted Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman to push for reopening international trade borders to American beef as soon as possible.

In a letter to Veneman, Baucus cited the recent DNA findings proving the Canadian origin of the infected cow, which means that the U.S. should be considered BSE-free, dependant upon the health of the infected cow's offspring. Baucus requested that Veneman appoint a "special, high-level envoy" responsible for negotiating directly with trading partners around the world to eliminate import trade bans against U.S. beef.

"The strength of the beef industry is vital in my state of Montana and in rural communities around our nation," Baucus said. "This week's DNA confirmation that the cow found to have BSE was from Canadian origins should help to restore confidence in the beef market and should reopen international trade borders to our beef as soon as possible. With every day that goes by with the trade doors closed, our producers are facing losses of millions of dollars. We must take action."

Baucus was joined by a bipartisan group of 13 Senators in sending the letter. Full text of letter attached:

January 7, 2004

The Honorable Ann Veneman
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-0003

Dear Secretary Veneman:

Thank you for your hard work and dedication in response to the recent discovery of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) in a single dairy cow late last month. Your hard work is helping to restore consumer confidence in the safety of the U.S. food supply. Unfortunately,

in the wake of this discovery, more than 40 countries – including most of our largest export markets – have imposed bans on the importation of U.S. beef products. It is difficult to overstate the danger that the loss of these markets poses to an industry worth \$175 billion to our constituents.

Swift and vigilant action is needed to minimize this loss and to ensure a re-opening of trade at the earliest possible juncture. Accordingly, we ask that you make re-opening borders to American beef a top priority by appointing a special, high-level envoy who will maintain a persistent and productive dialogue with each of these countries, and with any other country that is considering imposing a similar ban. A special envoy empowered by you to negotiate directly with trading partners around the world will send a strong signal that the U.S. is committed to working in a science-based manner to re-open trade.

Yesterday, the U.S. Department of Agriculture reported that DNA tests confirm the Canadian origin of the infected cow. Importantly, this means that the U.S. should be considered BSE-free, according to the standards of the International Office of Epizootics (OIE), to which 165 countries – including nearly all of those who have imposed import bans – are signatories, provided the calves born to this cow within the past two years have been slaughtered. The OIE standards represent a global consensus of scientific opinion. Indeed, the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Measures encourages all WTO members to harmonize their own SPS regimes to OIE standards, in the pursuit of a common international standard.

The beef industry is a pivotal economic component of many rural communities, and we know the U.S. has the safest food supply in the world. That's why we must do all we can to ensure stability in the market, which includes re-opening these borders as soon as possible.

A special envoy, authorized by you to work tirelessly towards the termination of import bans against U.S. beef, will be dedicated to full and constant communication with our trading partners, as well as with all other federal agencies, to bring stability to an industry that is essential to the health of the U.S. rural economy.

Thank you in advance for your immediate consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Max Baucus
Larry Craig
Ben Nelson
Norm Coleman
Zell Miller
Mike Crapo
Mark Dayton
Saxby Chambliss
Craig Thomas
Mitch McConnell

Conrad Burns
Chuck Grassley
Chuck Hagel
Blanche Lincoln

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