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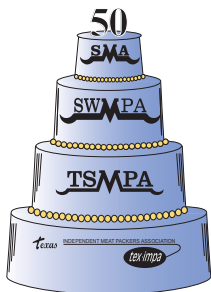
Edited by Phyllis Zimmerman

Senator Submits Bill to Ban Japanese Beef Imports

Senator Ben Nelson (D-NE) has submitted to the Senate Finance Committee a bill to ban Japanese beef imports if Japan does not promptly resume U.S. beef imports. Claiming Japan's reinstated import ban on U.S. beef is "unnecessarily harsh and overly broad," the bill demands the U.S. government stop importing beef products grown or processed in, or exported from, Japan unless the U.S. government submits to the Congress, no later than 30 days after the bill is enacted, a certification that Japan is no longer prohibiting the importation of U.S. beef. U.S. Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns aired his opposition to the bill, telling reporters, "I've never believed in sanctions. Sanctions invite the other side to do something, then we have to do something, and on and on. My hope is that we can work with Japan and get [this] resolved, so we don't have to deal with sanctions." In January, one month after Japan partially lifted its two-year-old import ban on U.S. beef, it reinstated the ban when specified risk materials that were not approved for export to Japan were found in a shipment from a New York meat processor. In the bill, Nelson emphasizes that Japan reacted to the single incident of noncompliance by banning all imports of U.S. beef and that the ban has been "damaging and unfair" to the U.S. beef industry.

Researchers: Recent BSE Cases Are Atypical Strain

Researchers were cited as saying that two cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) in Texas and Alabama seem to have resulted from an atypical strain that could appear spontaneously in cattle. According to an Associated Press report, government officials are trying to play down differences between the two U.S. cases and the BSE epidemic that has led to the slaughter of thousands of cattle in Britain since the 1980s and that it is precisely these differences that are complicating efforts to understand the brain-wasting disorder. USDA's chief veterinarian, Dr. John Clifford, was quoted as saying in an interview that, "It's most important right now, 'til the science tells us otherwise, that we treat this as BSE, regardless." The Texas and Alabama cases, confirmed last year and recently, are drawing international attention. At a meeting in London last month, experts presented research on the U.S. cases and on similar ones in Europe. These cows appear to have had an "atypical" strain that scientists are only now starting to identify. Such cases have been described in about a dozen cows in France, Italy and other EU countries, as well as Japan. In the two U.S. cases, researchers did not detect the telltale spongy lesions caused by prions, the misfolded proteins that deposit plaque on the brain and kill brain cells. In addition, the prions in samples from the Texas and Alabama cows seemed to be distributed differently than tissue samples affected with the classic form.



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S. Korea Delays Beef Imports Due to U.S. Slaughter Practices

Last week, South Korean officials indicated that they now see imports resuming in July, as opposed to later this month as expected. Park Hyun-chool, head of the agriculture ministry's livestock bureau, said systemic problems discovered during their inspection of 37 meat processing facilities in the U.S. last month need to be addressed. USDA Secretary Mike Johanns was optimistic that the two sides can work out those differences in fairly short order and that July beef shipments seem likely to South Korea. Basically, South Korea has asked the U.S. to change its beef processing practices. Park said officials were looking into whether butchering processes across the United States need to be changed, or just in those slaughterhouses intending to ship products to South Korea. Seoul has raised concerns about U.S. slaughterhouses that butcher live cattle imports alongside animals raised in the United States. Another point of concern is that while most U.S. beef processing facilities had two or more slaughter and processing lines, a few had only one line for processing the meat of all cattle, regardless of age. The butchering of imported animals is an issue since South Korea currently only allows beef from cattle raised in Australia, New Zealand and Mexico, countries that have had no known outbreak of BSE. Experts also said the use of a single butchering line could make it hard to determine if the meat is from cattle older or younger than 30 months old and the practice of using the same tools risks cross-contamination. South Korea agreed in January to only import beef from cows under 30 months old and has banned bone-in beef, such as ribs. Park also said that officials were concerned with reports that animal-based protein feeds are still being used, despite the 1997 ban. The director general rejected calls from U.S. lawmakers to tie the import of bone-in beef and offal to their support for a proposed bilateral free trade agreement (FTA). He said the focus on beef is to make certain health concerns are satisfied, and has nothing to do with trade.

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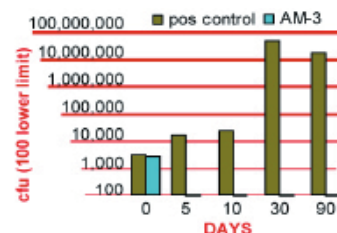
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Meat Grading Program Under Review: The federally regulated meat grading program is under review by the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS). The Customer Service Survey on Meat Grading and Certification Services will gather information from its customers to determine the quality of service provided. AMS will collect information to evaluate services and to assist in planning and managing the program. Participation in the survey is voluntary. The Notice is available online at: <http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/01jan20061800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2006/E6-8971.htm>.

Senate Rejects Effort to Cut Estate Tax: The Senate rejected a major Republican effort last Thursday to eliminate the estate tax on inherited wealth. The vote was a big defeat for both President Bush and Senate Republican leaders. Sixty votes were required to end debate on the bill and prevent a filibuster, but the measure got only 57, with 41 Senators voting against and 2 not voting. Only a few lawmakers crossed party lines. Though a handful of lawmakers continued to search for a compromise that could pass, negotiators appeared unable to reach a deal before the end of the week, if ever. Under current law the estate tax is set to decline and eventually disappear entirely in 2010, but then resume in its entirety in 2011.

R-CALF Files Another Appeal: The Ranchers-Cattlemen Action Legal Fund-United Stockgrowers of America (R-CALF-USA) has filed a notice of appeal in U.S. District Court of Montana of an April decision by District Judge Richard F. Cebull. That decision denied the organization's effort to get a permanent injunction against allowing Canadian imports of cattle under 30 months of age and beef products into the U.S. R-CALF won a preliminary injunction in District Court in March, 2005 that was reversed by a three-judge panel from the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in July, 2005. They then asked the District Court to hear arguments on a pending motion for summary judgment. Judge Cebull ruled in April, 2006, the 9th Circuit had, in effect, already decided the merits of the case with the July ruling.



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