



News Release

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NMPF ASKS USDA TO EXTEND COMMENT PERIOD ON OPENING OF CANADIAN BORDER TO IMPORTED CATTLE

More Time Needed to Examine Impact of Additional Canadian Imports

ARLINGTON, VA – In order to give the dairy industry more time to assess the potential impact of a surge of imported Canadian dairy animals, NMPF is asking the U.S. Department of Agriculture to extend the comment period on its proposal to re-open the Canadian border after a four-year hiatus.

The USDA recently invited public comments on its proposal to open the Canadian border to live animals to be used for breeding purposes, which includes dairy heifers. Canadian had been exporting approximately 60,000 dairy heifers annually to the U.S., until the border was closed in May 2003, following the discovery of bovine spongiform encephalopathy, or mad cow disease, in a Canadian cow. The comment period closes next month, after which USDA is expected to move forward with plans to reopen the border to full Canadian imports of live animals and cuts of meat.

In a letter sent Thursday to Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns, Jerry Kozak, President and CEO of NMPF, wrote that NMPF “is concerned that opening the border for live bovines will have significant economic impact upon U.S. dairy producers, and the livestock industry in general.”

“NMPF feels additional time is necessary, beyond the 60 days provided in the proposed rule, to thoroughly review and evaluate the proposed rule and accompanying documents with our membership,” NMPF’s letter said. The letter asks the USDA for an additional 60 days to comment, beyond the scheduled end of the comment period on March 12.

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Even though eight cases of BSE have been found in Canadian cattle in the past four years, the USDA regards Canada as a nation at minimal risk for BSE. Under USDA's proposal, no cattle born prior to March 1, 1999, would be allowed to be exported to the U.S. when the border reopens.

However, NMPF points out in its letter that "three of the last five Canadian BSE cases were cattle born after this date. If Canada has other cows born after this date that are BSE positive, then they could be brought into the U.S. and live amongst the U.S. dairy herd."

The discovery of any additional cattle in this country with BSE, even if they are of Canadian origin, could generate a significant negative effect on the U.S. cattle industry, NMPF noted, writing that "the economic impact of this possibility needs to be carefully examined and analyzed." The first case of mad cow disease discovered in the U.S. in 2003 was in a dairy animal imported from Canada.

A full copy of the letter to USDA is available at www.nmpf.org.

The National Milk Producers Federation, based in Arlington, VA, develops and carries out policies that advance the well being of dairy producers and the cooperatives they own. The members of NMPF's 32 cooperatives produce the majority of the U.S. milk supply, making NMPF the voice of nearly 50,000 dairy producers on Capitol Hill and with government agencies.

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