Canadian Cattlemen's Association

News Release

USDA Reconfirms Intention to Re-Open Border to Canadian Cattle

(June 10, 2005) The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has strongly reconfirmed its intention to re-open the U.S. border to under 30 month feeder and slaughter cattle from Canada, as permitted under the USDA minimal risk rule. Implementation of that rule is delayed by a preliminary injunction issued in U.S. District Court, Montana Division.

USDA reconfirmed its position at a U.S. Industry Roundtable convened by U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns, where panelists representing all sectors of the U.S. beef industry spoke in favour of re-opening the border and emphasized the safety of both U.S. and Canadian beef. Only two panel members, representing R-CALF and the National Farmers Union, argued for keeping the border closed.

"We sometimes forget that the court action that's delaying the border re-opening is only supported by a small group of isolationists who don't recognize that trade is a two-way street," says Betty Green, a Canadian Cattlemen's Association (CCA) director who attended the Roundtable as an observer. "Following the panel, the floor was opened for comments. Speaker after speaker, from cow calf producers to union leaders, stated loudly and clearly that they want the border open and that R-CALF's delaying tactics are hurting them."

Information presented at the Roundtable described the equivalent safety measures in place on both sides of the border. Those in attendance also heard that the USDA rule is in accordance with World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) guidelines for trade. The economic consequences to the U.S. of the border closure were also discussed, including the impact of packer consolidation as small plants are unable to remain viable without access to Canadian cattle. That fact was underlined by the announcement that a plant in Gering, Nebraska had closed, largely due to the border closure, with a loss of 200 jobs. This is in addition to approximately 6,000 Americans already estimated to have had their jobs affected by the border closure.

"As a Canadian cattle producer it was gratifying to attend this event and hear so many U.S. experts defending Canada's reputation and position," says Green. "Clearly R-CALF is in the minority. I look forward to the U.S. judicial system weighing the facts and coming to the right decision."

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CCA is the National Voice for the Beef Cattle Industry, representing over 90,000 Cattle Producers