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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-2504
February 7, 2005

The Honorable Bob Goodlatte
Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Goodlatte,

Over the past several weeks, many Missouri cattle producers have expressed their concern to me about USDA's decision to re-open the Canadian border to limited beef trade on March 7, 2005.

As you know, on January 4, 2005, USDA published its final rule establishing Canada as a region of the world presenting a "minimal risk" of introducing bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) into the United States. The rule, which would take effect on March 7, would permit the imports of, among other things, live Canadian cattle and other bovines for feeding and for immediate slaughter. All cattle must be under 30 months of age, and feeder cattle must be slaughtered before 30 months of age. Animal product from animals slaughtered after 30 months of age will also be permitted into the U.S.

Since USDA made its announcement, Canadian agriculture officials have confirmed two new cases of BSE within Canada's borders. While it is clear both the U.S. and Canadian governments are working hard to ensure the safety of our food supply and to use important science-based mitigation efforts, I remain skeptical about the Administration's decision to re-open the Canadian border to beef trade at this time. All of this activity comes as the United States is negotiating with Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, China, Egypt, and Russia to reinvigorate our beef trade relationship that was soured after a Canadian dairy cow was transported to the U.S. and diagnosed with BSE in December 2003.

On February 3, 2005, the Senate Agriculture Committee held hearings so that the legislative branch of government, which is most directly accountable to the American people, could hear testimony from Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns and other USDA officials. Because this issue is important to many Show-Me State farmers and to producers throughout America, I urge you to promptly schedule hearings in the House Agriculture Committee so that we may hear from USDA officials on this issue.

With best regards, I am

Sincerely,



IKE SKELTON
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Collin C. Peterson
Ranking Member