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Vote on Horse Slaughter Set for September

As of July 31, 203 Representatives had signed on to support H.R. 503, the American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act, introduced by Representative John Sweeney (R-NY). Debate and a vote on the bill is scheduled as the first order of business on Thursday, September 7, when Congress reconvenes. Time is running out to tell your leaders in Congress why they should oppose this bill. H.R. 503 bans the slaughter and processing of horses based on emotion, rather than sound science, safety, or public health. It would pose an undue limitation on the rights of livestock owners and could set a dangerous precedent for future legislation affecting animal agriculture. The horse industry is a livestock trade, and the slaughter and processing of horses is well regulated under the USDA's Humane Slaughter Act, providing a useful management option for horse owners. The bill fails to address what to do with the over 70,000 unwanted horses that are sent to processing plants each year. "Our concern is that these horses won't be cared for properly, will just be left in pastures without the proper medical or nutritional care or, even worse, sent down to Mexico where slaughter is out of the control of the USDA," said Mark Lutschaunig of the American Veterinary Medical Association, which supports horse slaughter. Two U.S. House committees recently held hearings on the proposed bill; the House Energy and Commerce Committee discharged the bill to the House without debate and the House Agriculture Committee voted 37-3 to discharge the bill unfavorably to the House after a number of witnesses testified opposing the legislation. NCBA and TSCRA member Paxton Ramsey testified, "The most compelling reason for cattlemen to oppose H.R. 503 is that it sets a drastic and dangerous precedent for regulating animal agriculture. The bill basically says that you can follow all regulations to the letter in terms of humane treatment, transport, and processing, but we're still going to ban horse slaughter simply because some people find the practice disturbing. If we allow that to happen, what's next? If we let our likes and dislikes determine animals' eligibility for slaughter, production agriculture is in really big trouble."

USDA Asks Court to Bar Further Lawsuits on Canadian Cattle

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is asking the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals for a summary judgment to bar further proceedings on a renewed attempt by an activist rancher group to stop the importation of Canadian cattle and beef into the U.S. USDA, in its latest motion filed last week, said no more briefs or arguments would be needed for the court to rule on the case. R-CALF United Stockgrowers of America, the plaintiff, believes the government would like to muzzle the group that says it has new evidence to present showing that Canadian cattle and beef present a threat of spreading bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) to the U.S. Canada recently announced its seventh case of BSE in a 50-month-old dairy cow, born more than four years after Canada implemented cattle feed restrictions to prevent the spread of BSE. It was earlier legal actions by R-CALF that forced the USDA to postpone lifting a U.S. ban on very young cattle and beef from those animals, but the USDA succeeded opening the border in July 2005. Now, in an appeal, R-CALF is asking the court to shut down trade again. R-CALF is scheduled to file its first brief in the appeal on September 21. It was the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals that struck down an injunction placed on the USDA, stopping it from allowing in Canadian cattle and beef. "Now that Canada has discovered infected cows born years after its feed ban began, it is clear that Canada should not have been classified as a Minimal Risk Region for BSE," R-CALF President Chuck Kiker said. The latest Canadian BSE case prompted the USDA in July to withdraw a proposal to allow older Canadian cattle into the U.S.

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USDA Revises Beef Checkoff Import Equivalents

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has published a final rule to revise the live animal weight equivalents used to calculate imported beef and beef products assessments under the beef checkoff program. The Beef Promotion and Research Order under the Beef Promotion and Research Act of 1985 uses live animal equivalencies to calculate assessments on imported beef and beef products. Since the inception of the program, the average carcass weight of domestic cows slaughtered in the United States under federal inspection to determine the amount owed by importers of beef and beef products was 509 pounds. The new live animal equivalency for imported beef and beef products, which is based on the past five-year average carcass weight of all U.S. domestic cows slaughtered under federal inspection, will be increased to 592 pounds. This average would take into account short-term highs and lows, yet still be current. The revision was published in the August 16, 2006 *Federal Register*. The effective date of this change will be September 15, 2006. For more information, contact Kenneth Payne, Marketing Programs Branch Chief, AMS Livestock & Seed Program at 202-720-1115. Copies of the final rule are available at www.ams.usda.gov/lsg/mpb/rp_beef.htm.

FDA Approves Bacteriophages as Food Additives

According to an *Associated Press* report, FDA officials have granted approval of viruses as a food additive for a mix of bacteria-killing viruses that can be safely sprayed on cold cuts, hot dogs and sausages to combat common food-borne microbes that kill hundreds of people each year. The combination of six viruses is designed to be sprayed on ready-to-eat meat and poultry products, including sliced ham and turkey, said John Vazzana, president and chief executive officer of manufacturer Intralytix, Inc. The special viruses, called bacteriophages, are meant to kill strains of *Listeria monocytogenes*, the Food and Drug Administration said, in declaring it safe to use on ready-to-eat meats prior to their packaging. The viruses are the first to win FDA approval for use as a food additive, according to Andrew Zajac, of the regulatory agency's office of food additive safety. The bacterium the viruses target can cause a serious infection called listeriosis, primarily in pregnant women, newborns and adults with weakened immune systems. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), an estimated 2,500 people in the U.S. become seriously ill with listeriosis each year, and of those, 500 die. Luncheon meats are particularly vulnerable to *Listeria* since once purchased they typically aren't cooked or reheated, which can kill harmful bacteria like *Listeria*, Zajac said. The preparation of bacteriophages, Greek for "bacteria-eater," attacks only strains of the *Listeria* and not human or plant cells, the FDA said. "As long as it used in accordance with the regulations, we have concluded it's safe," Zajac said. People normally come into contact with phages through food, water, and the environment, and they are found in our digestive tracts, the FDA said. Consumers won't be aware that meat and poultry products have been treated with the spray, Zajac added. The Department of Agriculture will regulate the actual use of the product. The viruses are grown in a preparation of the very bacteria they kill, and then purified. The FDA had concerns that the virus preparation potentially could contain toxic residues associated with the bacteria. However, testing did not reveal the presence of such residues, which in small quantities likely wouldn't cause health problems anyway, the FDA said. Intralytix, Inc., based in Baltimore, first petitioned the FDA in 2002 to allow the viruses to be used as a food additive. It has since licensed the product to a multinational company, which intends to market it worldwide, said Intralytix president Vazzana. He declined to name the company, but said he expected it to announce its plans within weeks or months. Intralytix, Inc. also plans to seek FDA approval for another bacteriophage product to kill *E. coli* bacteria on beef.

S. Korea May Reopen to U.S. Beef in October

South Korea is likely to resume U.S. beef imports as early as October, a senior Seoul official said Friday. A group of South Korean officials and experts are scheduled to visit the United States next week to examine meat processing facilities, in a final move to lift its years-long ban on U.S. beef imports. "After the team returns on September 4, the government will reach a conclusion on the resumption and announce it," Kim Chang-seop, head of the Agriculture and Forestry Ministry's animal health division, told a Korean radio station. It will take a month from the announcement of the resumption until the beef imports become available to local customers, Kim said. South Korea agreed in January to allow imports of beef from American cattle younger than 30 months, but the reopening has stalled over measures to ensure meat safety. South Korea, previously the third largest export market for U.S. beef, has banned American beef imports since the end of 2003, after a confirmed case of BSE. The United States had been pressuring Seoul to resume importing its beef as concern grows that it may lose a major importer. South Korea's cattle farmers have protested against the resumption of U.S. beef imports.

Briefly . . .

Register for Free FSIS Regulatory Education Sessions: FSIS will hold regulatory education sessions for the owners and operators of small and very small plants on August 22 and 23, in Texas and Georgia. The sessions will cover a regulatory walkthrough of the sanitation standard operating procedures, hazard analysis and critical control point and rules of practice regulations. The sessions will be held: Tuesday, August 22, from 6:30-8:30 PM, at the Embassy Suites Dallas Market Center, 2727 Stemmons Freeway, Dallas, Texas 75207; and Wednesday, August 23, from 6:30-8:30 PM, at the Sheraton Atlanta Downtown, 165 Courtland Street, Atlanta, Georgia 30303. To register by phone, call 800-336-3747. Online registration forms and information about upcoming sessions can be found at www.fsis.usda.gov/News_&_Events/Outreach_Sessions_SVS_Plants.index.asp.

Guatemala Opens Market for U.S. Beef: Guatemala has dropped all bone-related restrictions for beef and beef products imported from the U.S. All beef and beef products derived from cattle born and raised in the United States are now eligible for export to Guatemala. The Dominican Republic also reopened partial beef trade with the U.S. Beef and beef products (including veal) derived from cattle less than 30 months of age produced under an approved Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) Export Verification program are eligible for export. For updated export requirements, go to www.fsis.usda.gov/Regulations_&_Policies/Export_Requirements_EV_Countries/index.asp.

Russia Bans Michigan Poultry: Russian Agriculture Minister Alexei Gordeyev said Saturday that Russia has banned poultry and bird imports from the U.S. state of Michigan, where a bird flu virus was found in swans. The USDA said earlier last week that tests conducted in the state had found a strain of the bird flu virus in two wild swans, but the birds had not contracted the deadly H5N1 strain. However, Gordeyev said, "We must make sure that this dangerous infection will not be brought into Russia along with poultry meat imports."

Pilgrim's Pride Seeks to Acquire Gold Kist: Pilgrim's Pride Corp. announced on August 18 that it sent a proposal to Gold Kist, Inc., offering to purchase all of the outstanding shares of Gold Kist common stock for \$20 per share in cash. The transaction is valued at approximately \$1 billion, plus the assumption of Gold Kist's debt of \$144 million. "We believe the combination of Pilgrim's Pride and Gold Kist will create the world's leading chicken producer and result in substantial value creation for our respective shareholders, employees, business partners and other constituencies," said O.B. Goolsby, Jr., President and Chief Executive Officer of Pilgrim's Pride.

Pork Slims Down: A recent study by USDA's Agricultural Research Service shows that the most popular pork cuts are up to 16% leaner than they were 15 years ago. Samples were selected from supermarket meat cases in 12 U.S. markets, then analyzed for calories, total fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, vitamins and minerals. The pork tenderloin was the most improved in fat and saturated fat content, and also showed increases in vitamin B6 and niacin content. The study also showed that pork is free of trans fats. The National Pork Board, which funded the study, plans to spread the news with a point-of sale program and public relations initiative.

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