



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
March 17, 2008

Contact: Dan Virkstis  
(202) 224-4515

**BAUCUS, COLLEAGUES QUESTION USDA RULE ON  
ARGENTINA BEEF**

*Safe and open markets should be top priority*

*Washington, DC* – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) led several Senators in urging the Bush Administration to reevaluate a proposed USDA rule to declare the southern Patagonia region of Argentina free of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) and Rinderpest. In a letter sent March 14 to Agriculture Secretary Edward Schafer and Office of Management and Budget Director Jim Nussle, Baucus and his colleagues urged the OMB and USDA to carefully examine the conditions in Argentina and to furnish a comprehensive list of criteria used to assess the risk of FMD in Argentina and other countries that wish to export beef and lamb to the United States. The Senators also reminded USDA that U.S. cattle producers are unable to ship safe, delicious U.S. beef to many of our trading partners, and that opening markets for U.S. producers should be USDA's top priority.

**“The potential for Foot and Mouth Disease, no matter how small the risk, is not something we should treat lightly. Any decision to allow meat imports from countries with a history of this devastating disease must be fully scrutinized to protect U.S. cattle and sheep herds.”** said Baucus. **“It is also important that USDA keep its priorities straight. At a time when many of our beef producers are struggling, USDA must keep its eye on the ball and open key markets in Korea and Japan.”**

The full text of the Senators' letter follows here:

March 14, 2008

The Honorable Edward Schafer  
Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20250

The Honorable Jim Nussle  
Director, the Office of Management and Budget  
725 17<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20503

--more--

Dear Secretary Schafer and Director Nussle:

We are writing to express our concern regarding USDA's proposed rule to declare the southern Patagonia region of Argentina free of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) and Rinderpest, and to allow meat imports from this region. FMD is highly contagious, and an outbreak of this disease in the United States would be economically devastating for U.S. cattle and sheep producers. Any decision to allow regional access to U.S. markets in countries with a history of FMD must be carefully scrutinized.

We urge you not to issue the final rule for southern Patagonia until the rule has been reviewed by OMB. While OMB may view this particular rule as non-significant, it serves as a precedent for future rules that would regionalize FMD status, and deserves thorough examination. Further, we request that the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) provide a clear list of criteria and measures that all countries must meet in order for APHIS to determine that a particular region can be deemed free of FMD.

Beef producers in our states and throughout the country are struggling, due in no small part to the continuing bans on U.S. beef products in Korea, Japan and other countries. USDA's top priority should be opening these markets to U.S. exports and alleviating the market pressures on U.S. farmers and ranchers.

I look forward to your reply, and to working with you to restore market access for safe, high-quality U.S. beef.

Sincerely,

Sen. Max Baucus, (D-MT)

Sen. Jeff Bingaman, (D-NM)

Sen. Ben Nelson, (D-NE)

Sen. Ken Salazar, (D-CO)

cc: Ambassador Susan Schwab, United States Trade Representative  
Cindy Smith, Administrator, USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

###