

**Presentation by
Rosemary Mucklow
Executive Director
National Meat Association
Oakland, CA
California Senate Agriculture Committee
August 16, 2005**

MANAGING MAD COW: ARE WE DOING ENOUGH?

Chairman Denham and Committee Members

My name is Rosemary Mucklow. I am the Executive Director of National Meat Association, an organization based in Oakland and with member firms throughout the United States. I have served in successive capacities for this organization since 1961.

I appreciate the opportunity to present information to you this morning with respect to the efforts of the industry I represent, meat packers and processors, to protect the human food supply against the introduction of the animal disease, Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy.

You have this morning heard from distinguished academics, government officials and others about the huge collective effort from producers through to processors to assure that no infective prion proteins find their way into the U. S. human food supply. I will in no way attempt to repeat the extensive information presented today. I just want to assure you, in the strongest terms possible, of the commitment by the industry that I represent that holds an animal for a mere 24 to 48 hours to fulfill its part in supporting the multiple hurdles within its control to prevent the possibility of any infective material moving into the human food supply.

We strongly support the ruminant feed ban initiated by the U.S. Food & Drug Administration in August 1997. This feed ban means that ruminant materials do not enter the bovine feed system and are thus not re-circulated through bovine animals. It is believed that this was one of the major contributors in the United Kingdom that was not recognized for some years, and that contributed to the incidence in epidemic proportions of BSE in that country.

The industry I represent strongly supports the removal of Specified Risk Materials from bovines during the slaughter process. This is a regulatory requirement by USDA's Food Safety & Inspection Service, and failure to meet this requirement puts a company at risk of losing its authority to slaughter and process livestock. The industry has willingly cooperated with USDA to meet this requirement.

The industry I represent has also supported the same agency by not slaughtering disabled livestock. Disablement, one of the four Ds in the industry, may occur because the animal is unwell and does not want to get up, or it may have injured itself, such as slipped and broken a limb but is otherwise healthy. Such bovines, before the ban on disabled livestock, would have been identified at *ante mortem* and inspected with great scrutiny during evisceration and final *post mortem* inspection would have been under the direct authority of the veterinarian assigned to the plant. That disabled animal now never enters the plant that slaughters for human food.

Finally, the industry that I represent has worked closely with both FSIS and Animal Plant Health Inspection Service to assist them in identifying and sampling as many bovines as possible within the target population of adult cattle. We are impressed that this number is approaching 450,000 bovines at this time.

We are working and cooperating with USDA in every way possible to support the BSE Surveillance plan. We have asked the Secretary of Agriculture, and I was able to meet with him briefly last Friday when he led the Farm Forum meeting in Fresno, to work with us to meet the recommendations of his Animal Disease Task Force to complete the surveillance program.

National Meat Association is proud that our government has stood by the science-based principle on which we believe that international trade should be resumed. BSE is an animal disease, and production agriculture and packers and processors have worked with the federal and state government to find it if it is prevalent in the U.S. cattle herd. Had the answer to that question been yes, we all would have cooperated to do what it takes to prevent its re-infection of livestock. We're thankful that we did not find prevalence, and indeed thus far have only identified a single isolated case in an elderly animal. Some have suggested that every bovine entering the food supply should be tested for BSE and that at the very least individual companies should be permitted the option to test, and so inform their customers with a label of assurance. We disagree. This would, quite frankly send the wrong signal to our trading partners, especially Japan that has found about twenty instances of BSE in its bovine herd. Japan is working with our government on the terms of resuming trade, and accepting the international standard for countries like the U.S. that are considered minimal risk for this animal disease. Any move to test all animals would be hypocritical and undermine the leadership of the United States at a critical time in these international negotiations.

Consumer confidence in our product is enormously important – to producers who own that animal before it enters processing into meat and to the industry that I represent. It is our first priority.

I'd be pleased to respond to your questions.

* * * * *