

November 21, 2023

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

We write with a shared interest in protecting the United States against the introduction of foot-and-mouth disease and in strong opposition to the U.S. Department of Agriculture – Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service’s final rule, *Importation of Fresh Beef From Paraguay*¹. We urge you to utilize information from current and modern site visits in any rule’s risk assessment and to reconsider the final rule².

As you know, foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) is a highly contagious viral disease affecting cattle, pigs, sheep, goats, and other cloven-hooved animals³. FMD causes production loss and has serious impacts on international trade. While the United States eradicated FMD here in the late 1920s, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) continues to work to prevent FMD from reentering the country.⁴ According to USDA, “*The USDA, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) restricts certain animal products from entering the United States because of animal disease conditions in the country of origin. . . Paraguay is affected with FMD and the importation of fresh beef from Paraguay is prohibited.*”⁵

We understand and appreciate that exceptions may be made to such prohibitions. We also appreciate that USDA may only remove those prohibitions so long as certain criteria are met, including that “. . . *the meat comes from bovines or sheep that received ante-mortem and post-mortem veterinary inspections, paying particular attention to the head and feet, at the slaughtering establishment, with no evidence found of vesicular disease*”; and “. . . *that the establishment in which the bovines and sheep are slaughtered allows periodic on-site evaluation and subsequent inspection of its facilities, records, and operations by an APHIS representative.*”⁶ USDA has not met the criteria to remove prohibitions on importing beef from Paraguay.

¹ 9 CFR Part 94, Docket No. APHIS-2018-007, *Importation of Fresh Beef From Paraguay*, <https://public-inspection.federalregister.gov/2023-24782.pdf>. November 14, 2023.

² *Id.*

³ U.S. Department of Agriculture – Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, *Foot and Mouth Disease*, <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/animal-disease-information/fmd/index>. Modified on April 19, 2023. Accessed on November 14, 2023.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ U.S. Department of Agriculture – Food Safety and Inspection Service, *Paraguay*, <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/inspection/import-export/import-export-library/paraguay>. Modified on March 24, 2023. Accessed on November 14, 2023.

⁶ *Importation of Fresh Beef From Paraguay*, pages 2,3.

USDA relied on outdated site visits, irrelevant inspections, and inadequate data to overcome these prohibitions. According to the final rule⁷, USDA conducted site visits in Paraguay in December 2008 and July 2014 and dismissed concerns over the age of the site visits by relying on 2022 data provided by Paraguay. The data was never verified by in-country site visits, nor was it considered that Paraguay could be delivering dated or even biased information as it works to gain beef access to the U.S. market.

Paraguay knows what we all know – the U.S. is the largest, most reliable consumer of beef in the world. We have that reputation because of the tireless work of beef producers to provide the safest and most efficient beef production system in the world. The U.S. should not extend our market to unsafe actors at the risk of the health and livelihood of U.S. agricultural producers or consumers. An FMD outbreak in the U.S. would cause catastrophic damage to the U.S. economy and cut off access to vital export markets.

We urge USDA to halt the implementation of this rule until a more reliable risk assessment can be completed based on modern site visits in Paraguay instead of decade- and nearly decade-old visits and inadequate data.

Sincerely,



Tracey Mann
Member of Congress
Chairman, Subcommittee
on Livestock, Dairy, and
Poultry
House Agriculture
Committee



Jim Costa
Member of Congress



Frank D. Lucas
Member of Congress



Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress

⁷ *Id.*



Adrian Smith
Member of Congress



Yadira Caraveo, M.D.
Member of Congress



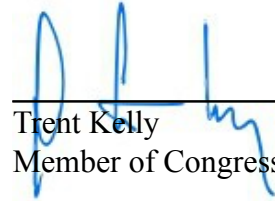
Austin Scott
Member of Congress



Donald G. Davis
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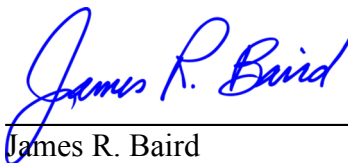
Trent Kelly
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