

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:
ARMED SERVICES
BANKING, HOUSING, AND
URBAN AFFAIRS
SELECT COMMITTEE ON
INTELLIGENCE
VETERANS' AFFAIRS
INDIAN AFFAIRS

December 12, 2024

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

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

American ranchers produce the highest quality beef in the world. The high demand for American beef has allowed producers to consistently supply a safe product to consumers across the globe. Yet as you know, foreign disease threats to the beef supply are always prevalent. In the past month, a threat has emerged in the form of the New World Screwworm (NWS).

As you know, NWS has been a persistent issue in the western hemisphere for decades. While the United States worked to eradicate NWS in 1966, the parasite has remained present in certain parts of Central and South America. In partnership with Mexico, U.S. officials have been able to largely contain the parasite. Despite these efforts, NWS detections have occurred periodically. The parasite presents not only a serious threat to animal safety, but it also has the potential to disrupt U.S. cattle markets.

Following a recent detection of NWS in Chiapas, U.S. officials made the right choice to halt feeder cattle imports from Mexico on November 24, 2024. While this action is temporary, it has allowed animal health officials to implement necessary surveillance measures.

To address current threats, I urge the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to proceed with real caution and to refrain from prematurely reopening the U.S.-Mexico feeder cattle trade. Prior to reopening this trade, USDA must thoroughly assess and address the concerns of the entire cattle industry. Additionally, animal health officials must effectively investigate the source of this spread.

I also encourage APHIS to clearly outline the process for making these trade decisions.

Animal health officials should take all the necessary steps to protect American producers. Our ranchers consistently deal with a number of uncontrollable factors, including rising input costs and volatile markets. It would be irresponsible to subject our domestic cattle herd to further uncertainty.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests.

Sincerely,



M. Michael Rounds
United States Senator