



Consumer Federation of America

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 13, 2006

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CFA's Carol Tucker Foreman: Three Cases of Mad Cow Disease and Still No Animal ID System

Today USDA announced that a third cow infected with BSE has been discovered. The Department was quick to assure the public that there is no public health concern. USDA was not able, however, to provide critical information about the animal. Where was it born? Where are the other animals that were part of the same herd? Are there likely to be other infected animals from that herd? Where did the meat from those animals go?

Twenty-seven months ago, after the first case of BSE was discovered in the United States, the U.S. government has no greater capacity to trace a "Mad Cow" back to its origins or answer crucial questions about its origins than it did on December 23, 2003.

Immediately after the first case was discovered, then USDA Secretary Ann Veneman promised a nationwide system of animal identification. It took 18 months for USDA to come up with a "strategic plan" for a system. Last month Neil Hammerschmidt, USDA's lead official on the program, told R-CALF members "Today there is no one working on rules to implement a mandatory program. We want to see what we can accomplish [on a voluntary basis] through market incentives, and we want to see what the market desires."

It is clear that USDA will continue to be the agent for cattle producers and ignore the pressing need for a mandatory, enforceable system to track animals. The refusal to act is shortsighted. Neither domestic consumers nor foreign markets are likely to be reassured that U.S. beef is safe until the government takes action designed to meet animal and public health goals instead of continuing to be driven by the whims of some cattlemen.

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Carol Tucker Foreman is the Director of the Food Policy Institute at the Consumer Federation of America. CFA is a non-profit association of 300 consumer groups, representing more than 50 million Americans, that seeks to advance the consumer interest through research, education and advocacy.