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RE: Docket 03-025IF, USDA's Downed-Animal Ban Is Too Late And Too Little

It is very sad that after so many years of lobbying for a ban on downer animals, with much research and common sense to support a ban, it took only one sick cow to implement it. I am glad USDA responded quickly to the first mad cow in the U.S. yet I am concerned about many things.

It is my understanding that the USDA has barred downed cows from entry into the human food supply. I also understand that skull, brain and eye tissue from cattle aged over 30 months (and small intestines from all cattle) is now also banned for human food. The Advanced Meat Recovery System and air-injected stun guns can no longer be used. While needed, these inadequate steps are not expansive enough to prevent BSE transmission to humans.

In addition, there is not a single measure to address animal welfare.

Items that are noticeably missing from the administrative ban are:

- * Regulations applying to farmed animals other than cows; such as pigs, poultry, and sheep.
- * Restrictions on the use of downed cows as food for companion animals or "livestock" feed; BSE can also affect domestic animals.
- * Requirements to humanely euthanize nonambulatory cows; once euthanized, these animals should be cremated. The ash can be used to fertilize ground.
- * Directives forbidding the use of chains, forklifts, trucks and shock prods to move animals. Chains and forklifts should only be used once an animal has been euthanized. Shock prods should be illegal. Period.

It is my understanding the present law permits U.S. stockyards and slaughterhouses to use inhumane and horribly cruel methods to move frail and crippled animals. Under the new rule these animals can still be kept alive until slaughtered for processing at rendering plants to produce tallow, meal or other animal by-product goods.

I respectfully request that the U.S. government immediately implement an industry-wide ban on the transport, marketing and slaughter of ALL downed animals for ANY purpose. Please expand the present ban to include:

--Humane euthanasia for downed cows, pigs, sheep, goats or any farmed animals. It is cruel to force any living creature to endure organ failure, broken bones, severed ligaments and open wounds over hours or days. In addition, Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (TSEs) have surfaced in deer, elk, sheep, goats and other animals. No one yet knows the extent to which TSEs can cross the species barrier. All downers are suspect.

--A ban on moving downed animals. There is no way to humanely move incapacitated animals. All downers should be mercifully euthanized. I read about one Texas stockyard where a calf was photographed struggling to stand on a mangled leg attached by a shred of hide and ligament. I read a stockyard horror story about a cow in Kentucky. I have read so many, too many...

--Mandatory training to prevent animals from becoming downers in the first place. According to Temple Grandin, advisor to the American Meat Institute, "Ninety percent of all downers are preventable." By implementing proper care procedures, animals will be healthier, without the need for routine antibiotics and in turn the food supply will also be healthier.

--A ban on the use of downed animals for "pet" and "livestock" foods. This is great concern for me and my family. We rescue and care for several animals. They are special needs and require special foods. I pay more for my pet food but does paying more really protect them under the current laws? Roughly 100 cats have already been diagnosed with Feline Spongiform Encephalopathy in Europe.

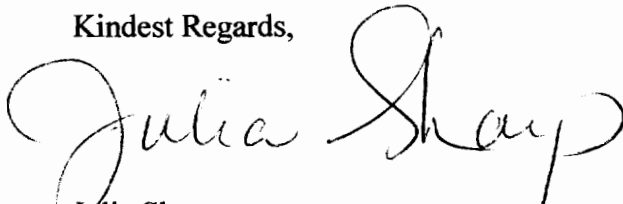
--Enforceable and permanent implementation. Any effort to dilute the ban to appease agribusiness is a step in the wrong direction. If you look at it fully, there are more consumers than agribusinesses. They are there to furnish the consumer with clean foods. The consumer is trusting them and the government to assure the food supply is clean and healthy.

Until Congress enacts the Downed Animal Protection Act (S. 1298/H.R. 2519), the USDA's temporary rule is vulnerable. Hopefully, the Downed Animal Protection Act will codify the current ban, cover other species, and designate humane euthanasia for all.

If this legislation had passed in 2002--or not been rejected as an amendment to the Agricultural Appropriations bill last November--the mad cow in Washington state would never have entered the human food chain.

I strongly encourage the USDA to strengthen and enforce measures to protect animals and reduce risk of BSE.

Kindest Regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Julia Sharp". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned to the right of the typed name.

Julia Sharp
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