

**NATIONAL
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AGRICULTURE**



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April 12, 2004

FSIS Docket Clerk
Room 102, Cotton Annex
300 12th and C Street, SW
Washington, DC 20250-3700

Re: Docket # 03-025IF

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Food Safety and Inspection Service' (FSIS) proposal regarding the handling of specified risk materials (SRM) and non-ambulatory animals. We applaud the proactive stance taken by USDA in addressing BSE. At the same time, we recognize that this has been a very emotional and economically-difficult time for our nation's livestock producers. The opportunity to be involved in this rulemaking is greatly appreciated.

First, we would offer our support for regulations that would ban SRMs from cattle from entering the human food supply. In our review of the literature, it appears that FSIS' recommendation for SRMs is consistent with the current pool of scientific knowledge, and the National Institute for Animal Agriculture (NIAA) supports these restrictions. Any further expansion of the SRM definition must be based on science, targeting tissues scientifically proven to be at-risk for BSE transmission.

Our major concern continues to lie with the broad definition of "non-ambulatory disabled" cattle. FSIS suggests that all cattle that have broken a limb during transport should fall under this definition and be classified as "unfit" for human consumption. While we understand the public health objectives of this proposed rule, the NIAA Board of Directors supports modifying the definition of "unfit" in light of current scientific evidence on BSE and its public health implications.

First, NIAA proposes to allow younger animals (<30 months of age) that are unable to rise or walk as a result of a traumatic injury to be presented for slaughter subject to ante-mortem and post-mortem inspection.

Second, NIAA suggests that older animals (>30 months) suffering a traumatic injury can also be considered for slaughter if they pass ante- and post-mortem inspection and are subject to the "test and hold" provision that FSIS recently implemented.

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Providing these two options for producers to market traumatically-injured animals address one of the areas of greatest financial hardship for producers while continuing to protect the public health. Furthermore, allowing traumatically-injured animals to go to a harvesting facility will place these animals into a surveillance pool, rather than excluding them, and engender good will among producers that will translate into a more effective surveillance program.

Thank you again for the consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "R. L. Sibbel". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "S" at the end.

R. L. "Rick" Sibbel, D.V.M.
NIAA Chairman of the Board