

**Is the U.S. Inviting a New Crisis for the Cattle Industry?**  
**R-CALF USA Radio Segment**  
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The U.S. and much of the world remains swept up by the COVID-19 crisis. The U.S. did not invite this virus to enter our borders, but reports indicate that we had relaxed our defenses by primarily relying on another government – the Chinese government, to notify us that a disease contagion may be headed our way. Those same reports suggest the notification came way too late.

Relying on other governments, including those that don't particularly like the United States, as our primary defense against the introduction of highly contagious and even potentially life-threatening foreign diseases and pests seems inappropriate.

But the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has a long history of doing just that, and there is now a historical list of empirical evidence showing that relying on foreign governments is an unacceptable risk.

For example,

In 2000 the U.S. relied on the Argentinian government to ensure it wasn't exporting beef from animals infected with foot-and-mouth disease. However, by mid-2001 it was learned that Argentina had failed and refused for many weeks to report widespread outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease within its borders. When I asked the USDA's chief veterinarian why he was resuming imports of fresh beef from Argentina when the country had a history of hiding foot-and-mouth disease outbreaks, his response was that there are now new officials in the Argentinian government.

In the mid-2000s the U.S. relied on the Brazilian government to ensure it wasn't exporting beef to the United States from cattle with bovine spongiform encephalopathy, otherwise known as BSE or mad cow disease. However, in 2012 it was learned that Brazil had failed to report a case of BSE in its cattle herd that had been detected nearly two years prior to Brazil's belated notice, which was far too late for the U.S. to take any defensive measures.

For decades the U.S. relied upon the government of Canada to ensure it wasn't exporting tainted beef to the United States. But in 2012 the U.S. was forced to initiate one of the largest beef recalls in history after it was learned that a Canadian packing plant was exporting millions of pounds of beef to the U.S. tainted with *E. coli* and the Canadian government had not required its packing plant to fully implement or regularly updated its food safety program.

These are all near misses. They represent recent examples of when and where the United States' reliance on foreign governments to protect the health of America's cattle herd and American citizens was misplaced.

If we've learned anything from COVID-19, we've learned it's far better to prevent the introduction of pernicious foreign diseases than it is to try and control them once they've entered our border.

So, this begs the question: Why in the world would the USDA continue to allow high-risk imports from countries where foot-and-mouth disease and other devastating diseases are known to exist?

The USDA has already answered this question. It stated that as a result of the U.S. entering the Uruguay Round Agreement, which is what formed the World Trade Organization or WTO, and I quote, "The United States can no longer require foreign countries wishing to export meat and poultry products to have meat and poultry inspections that are 'at least equal' to those of the United States."

Lest there be any doubt that the reason the United States is systematically dismantling our import restrictions that have protected our country from the introduction of dangerous foreign animal diseases and pests for decades is because we have ceded that responsibility to a global governing body known as the WTO, the USDA also explained why it was continuing to dismantle those import protections and, instead, would begin relying on foreign governments to protect us from diseases by stating:

"The fundamental purpose of the changes we are making to the regulations . . . is to fulfill U.S. commitments under international trade agreements."

So, there it is. Protecting your health and safety, and that of your livestock, is no longer the fundamental purpose of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The fundamental purpose of that agency is to facilitate more imports, even from countries like Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Namibia, all of which present a clear and present risk of introducing diseases that we are not prepared to control.

And this too we have learned from the COVID-19 experience.

It's time to pick up your phones to call your members of Congress to tell them enough is enough, they must stop allowing imports from countries that have not eradicated highly contagious diseases from within their own borders.

Thank you for helping us build support for the American rancher. If you'd like to learn more about what R-CALF USA is doing to help the American rancher and all of Rural America, please go to our website at [www.r-calfusa.com](http://www.r-calfusa.com).