



THE WALL STREET JOURNAL. ONLINE

December 23, 2003 7:16 p.m. EST

Cattlemen's Assn: 'Confident In Safety Of US Beef Supply'

DOW JONES NEWSWIRES

By Richard Gibson
Of DOW JONES NEWSWIRES

DES MOINES, Iowa -- The nation's cattle producers, reacting to news of what may be the first case of mad cow disease in the U.S., insisted late Tuesday that "Americans can be confident in the safety of U.S. beef."

Addressing media on a hastily organized conference call, the chief executive of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, Terry Stokes, alluded to what he called a "triple firewall" system in place to protect humans and animals against contracting the brain-wasting disease, which he insisted worked in identifying a lone suspected dairy cow in Washington state.

Stokes also outlined plans by the cattlemen's group to launch a media blitz in coming days to reassure American consumers - as well as those in Japan and other countries that import U.S. beef - that they need not stop eating the red meat. Appearances on major television network shows are to begin Tuesday night, he said.

The organization, which represents what by its own estimate is a \$175 billion industry, said it will fully cooperate with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and other officials in their investigation of the "presumptive case" of bovine spongiform encephalopathy, or BSE, as the disease is formally known.

"While this one case is unfortunate, systems have been built over the past 15 years to prevent this disease from spreading and affecting either animal health or public health," the association said in a statement.

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The triple firewall Stokes referred to consists of surveillance, a ban on imports of cattle and bovine products from countries with BSE, and a ban on feeding ruminant-derived meat and bone supplements to U.S. cattle herds.

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URL for this article:

http://online.wsj.com/article/0,,BT_CO_20031223_006661,00.html

Updated December 23, 2003 7:16 p.m.

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