



## **Johanns Addresses Convention**

by **Meghan Soderstrom**

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DENVER, CO (Feb. 3, 2006) — Despite recent trade setbacks, “unwavering consumer confidence in the safety of American beef” continues to increase global demand, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns said Feb. 3 at the 2006 Cattle Industry Convention in Denver, Colo.

“USDA (U.S. Department of Agriculture) is pushing hard to restore access to markets that closed a couple of years ago. And we have accomplished a great deal,” Secretary Johanns said. “Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan have resumed trade in various beef products.”

Johanns called Japan's reinstated ban on U.S. beef a “temporary setback” and said the United States' failure to meet the trade conditions was “unacceptable.” Although the U.S. is eager to resume trade with Japan, “we don't intend to sacrifice thoroughness for speed in our investigation. We'll move as rapidly as we can, but when we're done we want to be able to say it was thorough,” Johanns explained.

Johanns pledged “scrupulous attention to our trade agreements that we have with various customers around the world” and maintained that “American beef is

absolutely safe.

“Not only is American beef safe, I can also report to you, with a tremendous body of information to back this up, that our herd is healthy,” he continued. The largest herd health testing program in the U.S. has found only one positive test for bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) out of more than 600,000 tested cattle to date.

Agricultural trade exports are forecasted to reach \$64.5 billion this year — that's 25% more than in 2000, he said. Johanns emphasized the importance of export markets by pointing out that 95% of the world's population lives outside of the United States. That means 95% of our potential customers cannot be reached through domestic sales, he said.

“Free and open trade based upon scientifically sound and internationally recognized” standards are this administration's goals. But other issues, such as animal identification (ID) and traceability can also limit trade, he said.

Johanns said that implementing the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) would be a “crucial tool in safeguarding the health of agricultural animals from disease.

“One only needs to look to other parts of the world — to Australia or other countries — to understand another reason why it’s important. ... They are aggressively marketing their animal traceability to gain whatever competitive advantage they can gain,” he said.

Johanns then addressed concerns about USDA’s switch to a privately held ID database, saying that the system is not a “retreat.”

“Our longstanding goals remain to move forward quickly without causing unnecessary burden on producers and without unduly increasing the size of government. ... Let me assure you that I’m not changing course,” he explained.

Under the current proposal, the

industry would “continue to own and have control over the animal movement data. But through agreements established between private entities and the USDA,” state and federal health officials would still be able to access the information if needed.

Johanns said the private database system provides “flexibility and allows for a robust private sector.” He also said a public system would take away price competition and innovation.

In concluding remarks that referenced the upcoming Super Bowl, the crowd erupted in applause when Johanns ended his presentation with: “Eat beef!”



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