

USMEF Reacts Cautiously To Hormone Ban Proposal

DENVER, Colo. — U.S. Meat Export Federation (USMEF) officials were cautiously optimistic about a proposal from the European Union (EU) to convene a broad-based conference for the purpose of reevaluating the EU ban on beef produced with growth promotants, or hormones.

EU Ag Commissioner Franz Fischler made the announcement at the Tenth World Meat Congress in Denver as the next step in resolving the long-standing trade dispute with the U.S.

"It was significant for the Commissioner to acknowledge publicly that the hormone ban has become a food safety problem in Europe," said USMEF president and CEO Philip M. Seng. "Convening a conference to be a comprehensive, science-based perspective to this issue could be a positive step in resolving the ban."

Seng stressed that the outcome must be based on sound science and not consumer attitudes. "The scientific data leaves no question that government-tested and approved growth promotants, properly regulated, represent no health risk whatsoever to livestock or the public," said Seng.

The use of FDA approved growth promotants improves the tenderness of U.S. beef and increases production efficiency by as much as 20 percent, which reduces the cost to consumers. Since the EU hormone ban went into effect in 1990, U.S. beef exports to EU nations have been effectively blocked.

USMEF estimates today's potential in the EU market for high-quality U.S. beef at \$300-500 million.

Fischler said the conference will be held this autumn, and that it would be a balanced assessment of what will be in the long-term interest of the meat industry. Leading scientists will address the

issue during the conference, which will also be attended by consumer, producer, and industry representatives. Members of the European Parliament will also be invited.

"There is no dispute about the overall policy objective, and that is to protect health and welfare," Fischler said. "After the confer-

ence, I will make up my mind as to whether there is a need, and to what extent there are possibilities for adjusting the EU hormone ban."

Seng also expressed concern for the timing of the conference. "I would like to see the conference take place much sooner. We've waited long enough for a resolution to this trade barrier," said Seng. "We also need to get a date-certain by which the issue will be

resolved."

Fischler's announcement followed remarks by USDA Secretary Dan Glickman. "The prosperity of the country depends on free and open trade," said Glickman. "The United States will not accept the use of unsound science to restrict trade." Glickman added that the U.S. would not allow food safety issues, supported only by false science, to become the next generation of trade barriers.

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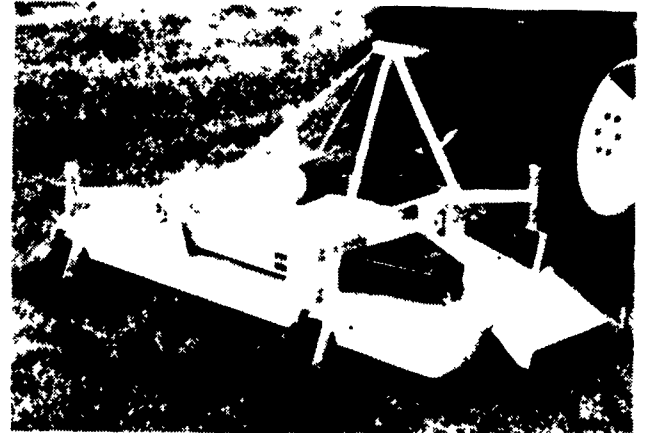
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