

# Foot And Mouth Disease Grips Europe, Spreads

(Continued from Page A30)

Beef producers' statements contradict Argentina's Agriculture Secretary Antonio Berhongara, who said there have been no outbreaks of the highly contagious virus. If the virus has infected livestock, Argentina faces trouble regaining its disease-free status, delaying the opening of new markets for exports of its famous grass-fed beef.

At stake is the country's \$6.9 billion beef industry, which exports cattle globally, including to the U.S. Argentine officials are requesting permission to increase its beef tariff rate quotas to the U.S. from 20,000 metric tons to 100,000 metric tons (approximately 500,000 head of live cattle).

In spite of the disease outbreaks, Brazilian officials announced through World Press

International on Feb. 28 that it expects to receive USDA clearance by Labor Day to begin shipping beef to the U.S. Once approval is received, Brazil hopes to be a powerhouse in the world beef market, says Agriculture Minister Francisco Turra. Besides shipping beef into the U.S., Brazil hopes that USDA approval will open doors into Asian markets, particularly Japan and South Korea. "Many countries, like Japan, are waiting for U.S. food safety approval, and there's a great deal of interest in Brazilian beef, which is hormone free," said Joao Heirelles, a former beef industry official, now serving as agriculture secretary for the State of Sao Paulo. He says Brazil plans to pour millions of dollars into an advertising targeted at consumers' health concerns. The campaign will use the English logo, "Brazilian Beef: A

Taste of Nature." With January's devaluation of Brazilian currency, Brazilian beef is cheap.

McDonnell says there's no way Brazilian beef will have clearance by Labor Day in light of the animal health problems the country is experiencing. "Their products would have to be certified first, and there's a rule making process with a comment period involved. It could be two years before Brazil receives USDA clearance."

With the European continent fighting BSE (mad cow disease), news that the fatal disease which affects humans has recently been found in livestock in Germany, France, Italy, and Spain has caused international companies like McDonald's and ConAgra to suddenly ask suppliers to sign "letters of compliance." The documents require those who slaughter and sell the companies

meat to guarantee the animals have not been feed meat and bone meal (MBM), which is one way animals can be infected with BSE.

McDonnell says the move is transparent at best. "I have no idea how these companies will apply this requirement on imported cattle and meat," he says. "Considering the transshipment and co-mingling of imported product that comes into the U.S.

from foreign countries, the only viable solution is for U.S. beef producers and consumers to demand that Congress take immediate action on meaningful country-of-origin labeling and import control mechanisms. American beef producers are at terrible risk. It's time to insist that their interests are put first. There's no time to waste in protection of our domestic beef supply and the American rancher."

## USDA Toll-Free Foot And Mouth Disease Call Line

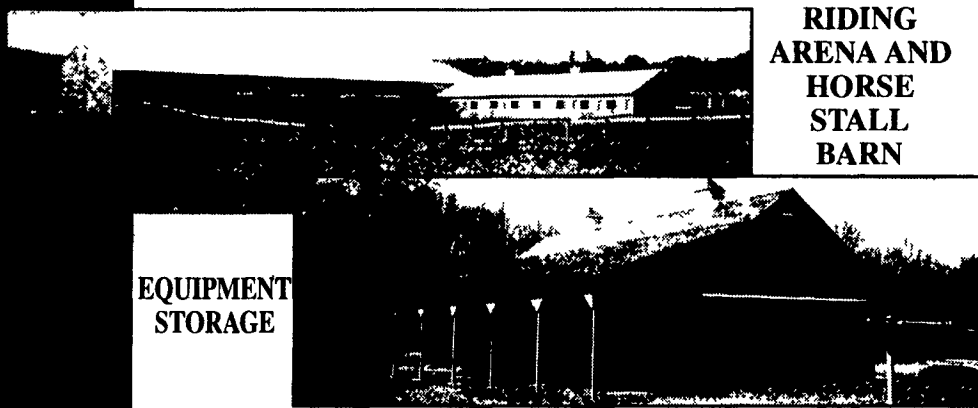
WASHINGTON, D.C. — The USDA has established a toll-free telephone center to respond to questions from the public, industry, and media regarding USDA's response to the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in Europe. The toll-free number is (800) 601-9327. International

callers can reach the center by dialing 01-301-734-9257.

The phone center is staffed by veterinarians and import/export experts from USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service who can explain the restrictions and regulations.

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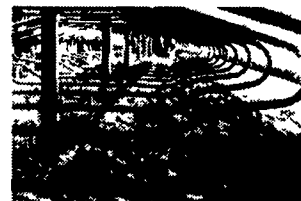
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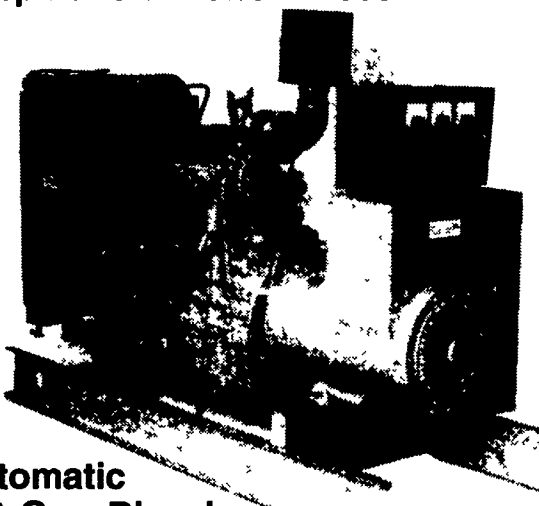
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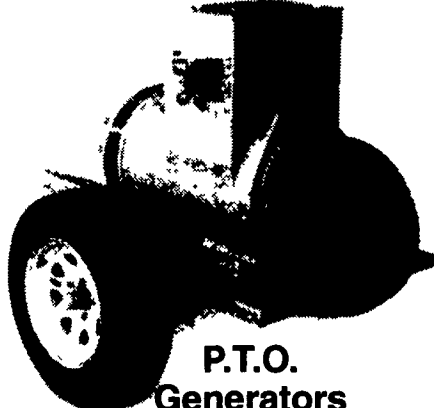
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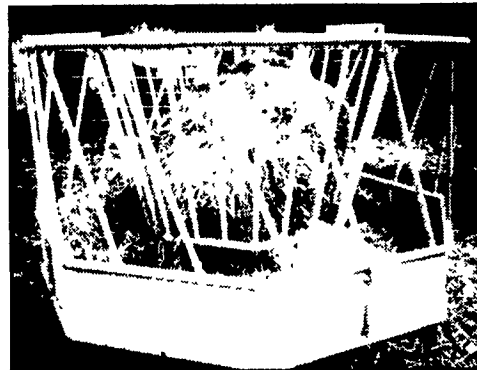
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