

has consistently opposed legislation banning the allowance of downer cows into the food supply.

Veneman's announcement was not meant to appease only U.S. residents. It was also to encourage foreign governments to resume imports of beef. In the past two weeks, tons of U.S. beef have been turned away from Asian markets, and even a shipload of french fries sizzled in animal fat was rejected.

The market has not reported what it did with the meat, although speculations of it being dumped into the ocean into the food chain of whales, dolphins and fish may not be far from the mark.

The Cattlemen's Beef Association is

Congressional leaders deleted a measure banning the slaughter of downed cattle from a spending bill.

Rep. Gary L. Ackerman (D-N.Y.), who for years has worked on legislation to ban downer cattle from the food supply, told the *Post* the industry "shot themselves in the hoof" by not banning the practice.

Meanwhile, animal rights activists are calling this a victory, both for improving slaughtering methods, and for not eating meat.

But Pringle says, "People are always going to eat beef. The question is: Is it going to be a boutique, grass-fed, no hormones, free-range, holiday-only meal, or three



going along with the ban, according to a *Washington Post* report that quoted Chandler Keys, vice president of government affairs of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, as saying, "We're going to support the actions of the secretary. We're going to have to manage it through as an industry. We think the industry will rise to the challenge."

Until the ban of last month, just under 200,000 sick or injured cattle were shipped to slaughterhouses per year, with only about 5 percent being tested for illnesses such as mad cow disease.

In November 2003, Republican

meals a day like we do now?"

He sees a shift toward the natural variety of meat, but says there is not enough land for the meat industry to switch over to the whole organic, grain-fed, free-range ideal.

Meanwhile, although the FDA has banned feeding cattle to cattle, some ranchers are still feeding animal protein to cattle.

"Calves are taken off milk and put on blood," says Pringle. "We've gone from cannibalism to vampirism."

The blood could very well come from a downer cow, as there are currently no regulations banning that practice. **EW**

MORE CONCERNS

Cow brain matter is also found in cosmetics and in membranes used in surgery. While opponents to any testing say the meat supply is safe, because cows' heads are removed from the carcasses and meat does not come into contact with brain matter, some methods of slaughter prove otherwise. Until just last week, a common killing method was by lethal air injection — a blast of air shot into the forehead that causes brain matter to dissipate into the spinal cord and blood stream, thereby potentially infecting all parts of the cow. U.S. Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman has now called a halt to that method of slaughter, which may make beef safer, but cosmetic companies and research labs are still using cow brain matter.



VACCINES AND TRANSFUSIONS

Worldwide, there have only been 153 documented cases so far of cow-to-human transmission of BSE/CJD. But in England last week variant CJD blood-to-blood transfusion occurred. "This is the second wave of this stuff — from human to human," says Pringle.

Vaccines are another source of concern. Some vaccines, such as those for polio, have been made with fetal calf serum in England. "There are no known problems, but they are taking tremendous risks that involve large numbers of people," says Pringle.

What are You Feeding Scruffy?

All parts of cows, including brain matter, are allowed into pet food. With no regulations banning the practice, how long will it be before we begin breeding mad dogs? — AS



AG REPORT

by Bobbie Willis

The regional/national mad cow scare has only reinforced for local, small-scale farmers certain principles around food and economy, namely keeping food sources as close to home as possible and keeping food production at a scale that is manageable and safe. Jack Gray, co-owner of Noti's Winter Green Farm, which produces certified organic fruits and vegetables and 100 percent grass-fed beef (soon to be certified organic, as well) says, "People really need to know where their food is coming from. It's important to establish relationships and trust between consumers and food sources."

One of the easiest ways to do this is to keep those food sources close to home. "The cattle industry is so big," says Aaron Silverman, manager of local poultry processor Greener Pastures Poultry and member of Creative Growers in Noti. "And there's so much movement of [cattle] within that industry ... Large batches of animals coming from lots of different places are being processed together."

Winter Green's Gray says, "Maybe someday technology will be able to track down sick animals [more efficiently] with things like microchips. But technology will never be able to do what local farming can do — to follow an animal from beginning through to the end ... we've actually been able to keep [recent] beef production limited to animals born and raised here on the farm." According to Winter Green's website, "Cows have long been the unifying force behind our farm's fertility program. ... We have chosen to take full responsibility for the animals our farm depends on. We treat them well because they deserve it and they are vitally important to our farm."

Scale — or more specifically farming on a large, industrial scale — poses big problems with an outbreak of this nature. Paul Atkinson of Laughing Stock Farms (see *EW* 10/23) says, "The scale of the current industry ... has yet again to do with 'not local.' It's amazing how many places that meat could be in so short a time. If even the butchering were local, the problem might have remained local, rather than national."

Because their work, as these farmers describe it, revolves around providing as safe and unadulterated a product as possible, they seem mostly unfazed by the scare. "It's been something of a topic of conversation," says Silverman. "But I don't know anyone who's surprised by it." Winter Green has had more inquiries than usual about their beef in the last few weeks, but supplies are always limited — they process only about 20 cows a year for beef.

While there is a pointed irony in federal regulations that can conceivably cripple smaller farms with complicated bureaucracy yet allow for the current mad cow situation, Silverman says, "The USDA/FSIS staff that I have ... had contact with are truly trying to ensure safe food for the public. While some of the regulations seem onerous for a small-scale producer, it's not usually the intent. The rules have to cover everyone, and the bigger plants dominate the landscape."

Silverman even sees hope for the future: "[Our] experience has been one of helpfulness ... and we expect that this positive relationship will continue through the planning and construction of an expanded processing facility in the near future."