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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Canadian Beef Imports Should Not Resume Until U.S. Government Conducts Thorough Risk Analysis of Mad Cow Disease**

*Statement by Patricia Lovera, deputy director of  
Public Citizen's Critical Mass Energy and Environment Program*

Since the discovery of a BSE-infected cow in Washington state in December 2003, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has been telling American consumers that the beef they buy for their families is safe; that the threat of BSE is minimal; and that the agency has been basing its actions on an "abundance of caution." But actions speak much louder than words, and so far, the USDA's actions on BSE are not inspiring a lot of confidence.

Last week's revelation that as much as 38 million pounds of beef were improperly imported from Canada was just the latest in a string of incidents that have left consumers wondering if this agency is more concerned about public health or public relations. For USDA's claims about the safety of the beef supply to have any credibility, the agency must take immediate action to:

1. Stop a proposed rule change which would allow the resumption of cattle and beef imports from Canada.

Until last year, and the discovery of BSE in Canada, the U.S. had maintained an ironclad principle of not accepting ruminants or ruminant products from countries with diagnosed cases of BSE. We only accepted imports from countries which were BSE-free. But when Canada lost its BSE-free status, USDA appeared to lose their will to put health concerns above trade relations.

We are calling on the agency not to allow the resumption of cattle and beef imports from Canada until a balanced scientific analysis determines whether the risk is acceptable and there is dramatically increased surveillance for BSE on both sides of the border. The USDA should work with Canadian authorities to determine the actual prevalence of BSE in the Canadian herd. Additionally, we urge the agency to track Canadian cattle already in the U.S. and test them at slaughter.

2. Involve the public health community and consumers.

The USDA is clearly under tremendous pressure from the meat industry and Canada to re-open the border. But the agency has not been so inclusive of consumer and health concerns. USDA should immediately convene public hearings to discuss its BSE-prevention program, and specifically their proposal to resume imports from Canada.

American consumers cannot determine if the beef they are buying at the grocery store is from Canada, the U.S., or anywhere else. If the USDA is going to tell them that all of the beef sold in this country is safe, the agency must enforce policies which put public health first. There is much more that USDA needs to do to ensure that we don't have homegrown cases of BSE. However, the possibility exists that more cases are lurking in Canadian herds. Allowing the unlimited import of Canadian cattle and beef without further study and surveillance is irresponsible.

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*Public Citizen is a national, nonprofit consumer advocacy organization based in Washington, D.C., with more than 160,000 members. For more information, go to <http://www.citizen.org/cmep/foodsafety/madcow/>*