



NATIONAL MEAT ASSOCIATION®

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Senate Appropriations Committee Members
California State Senate
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Committee Members:

National Meat Association, headquartered in Oakland, California, represents meat slaughterers and processors nationally. Our membership includes beef slaughterers in California that would be adversely impacted by SB 1425.

We have met with Senator Machado to discuss our concerns, and we have testified twice against the bill in Committee hearings. We appreciate that the Senator has amended the bill in an effort to address concerns. However, we continue to oppose the bill because we believe that it is fatally flawed.

The bill is designed to protect consumers against unsafe food, namely over beef contaminated with bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE). BSE is an animal disease, and following a serious outbreak of the disease in Great Britain in the 1980s, the United States initiated significant steps to prevent any similar problem in this country. These included, in succession, a ban on the importation of livestock from regions of the world where BSE was known to exist, quarantine and tracing on all livestock that was known to be in the United States to ensure they never entered the food supply. Initiated in August 1997 the mammalian feed ban, thereby ensuring that the known causative factor of feeding cattle with infected feed would not occur. Following the only known case of BSE in a bovine in the United States, a 6-year old cow slaughtered in Washington State in December but born in Canada before its feed ban, the USDA took immediate action to remove and require incineration of the most infective parts of bovines during sanitary handling practices in slaughter plants. These parts are called Specified Risk Materials (SRMs). Finally, the Secretary of Agriculture, on the advice of international experts, announced a plan to hugely increase testing of the national bovine herd to determine the prevalence of the disease. To date this year, over 15,000 tests are reported negative.

These steps assure the safety of the beef supply for consumers in the United States. They are supported by our organization and our members and are a serious responsibility pursuant to the Federal Meat Inspection Act (FMIA).

California gave up its “equal to” State inspection system in 1976 because it cost too much. USDA has the exclusive jurisdiction in over 600 meat and poultry slaughter and processing establishments in the State. Further, much beef consumed in the State comes from firms in other states.

SB 1425 does nothing to improve beef safety for California consumers. It is not based on sound science, the science that tells us that the mammalian feed ban and the proper dressing procedures, including the removal of SRMs are the most effective ways to assure beef safety. Rather, SB1425 will confuse consumers about how safe the beef supply is, and undermine their confidence in a staple of the American diet. Further, even if the California slaughterers were allowed to test and label the product, they would then be at an additional economic disadvantage with their out-of-state competitors.

We are enclosing an opinion from our Washington legal counsel that identifies the conflict with the federal law, and also points out that the last time California tried to enforce requirements different from this federal law, it lost its appeal before the United States Supreme Court 9 to 0.

We respectfully urge that you reject SB1425.

Sincerely,

Rosemary Mucklow
Executive Director

Enclosure