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ICA Fights to Prevent FMD

Lockhart, Texas – January 28 – For Immediate Release – ICA joined USCA and ATFA (American Task Force Argentina) this week for a highly successful trip to Washington, DC. The main purpose of the journey was to lobby to prevent USDA from allowing Argentina to ship fresh and chilled beef to the United States until FMD is totally eradicated from their country.

Presently Argentina ships the US large amounts of cooked beef, which is a safe product. Fresh or chilled beef could carry the FMD virus, which is airborne, and can spread with lightning speed. The group believes there is no reason to take this risk and expose the entire US cattle herd to FMD. The USDA must consider is that regionalization will set a precedent, so that other countries, such as Brazil, with FMD will want to regionalize and send us their beef. Also, other countries such as Uruguay, which cleaned up their FMD before being allowed to ship fresh or chilled beef to the US, will protest if we let Argentina regionalize without having to take the same steps.

The USCA group included ranchers from South Dakota, Montana, Nebraska, and the Cree Indian Nation, as well as our two Texas delegates, Rosalee Coleman and Brian Malaer. Together, they visited the House Agriculture Committee represented by Chandler Goule, the House Ag Subcommittee on Livestock represented by Alexis Taylor, and the APHIS office at USDA represented by Dr. John Clifford, USDA Chief Veterinarian. All the meetings were productive, and the group felt their concerns were heard. They also attended a Press Club Luncheon and Conference, which gained attention on the Hill and in various national press services.

Later in the week the Texans visited their Senators and Representatives. Malaer and Coleman spoke with staff at Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison's office, Senator John Cornyn's office, Congressman Henry Cuellar's office and Congressman Ruben Hinojosa's office. Congressman Lloyd Doggett and Congressman Nick Lampson both personally met with the group. Later the ICA group met with Bruce Knight, U.S. Department of Agriculture Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs. At each of these meetings the message was delivered for additional help in getting funding for the fever tick program, help in getting the packer ownership limitation provisions passed in the Farm Bill, and for a change in the Checkoff program rules to allow the promotion of US Beef.

AFTA is an alliance of groups that represent varied constituencies across the country who have been affected by Argentina's debt default of over \$81 billion--the largest recorded sovereign debt default in history. AFTA is comprised of educators, agriculture, business and taxpayer groups who have suffered losses because of this default. ICA and USCA believe this is yet another reason not to allow fresh and chilled beef into our country. If Argentina cannot be trusted to repay it's debts to US investors, why should they be trusted to follow the guidelines to ensure that FMD would not be allowed into the United States?

The bottom line is that ICA played an important part in national politics this week as we accompanied USCA and ATFA to protest the regionalization of Argentina, and then took the time to talk about other important issues for Texas ranchers. ICA appreciates the time spent by Rosalee and Brian, and hopes more members will consider a Washington trip in the future.

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