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**Web pages:**  
[www.MTBQA.org](http://www.MTBQA.org)

[www.Animalrangeextension.montana.edu](http://www.Animalrangeextension.montana.edu)

[www.mtbeefnetwork.org/](http://www.mtbeefnetwork.org/)

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## Response to Beef Recall

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The beef industry continues to condemn the actions by Hallmark/Westland Meat Packing Co. Chino, CA, that has led to the largest recall of beef products in history. But, it needs to be made clear that this was not a food safety recall and there is no evidence any of the 143,383,823 pounds of recalled beef was unwholesome, tainted in any way, or presented a danger to consumers. This recall was prompted because there were violations in USDA Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) pre-harvest inspection procedures that allowed beef from non-ambulatory ("downer") cattle into commerce.

All beef industry segments have a responsibility for wholesome product and quality control at every level of production. Producers have a responsibility and commitment to send healthy animals to processors. Those processors in turn have a responsibility to provide adequate employee supervision to insure that animals are treated properly and humanely.

It is important to note that a Class II recall is much different than a Class I recall where a health hazard situation might exist. In meeting its responsibility to consumers and using a preponderance of precaution in following its own guidelines, FSIS was obligated to rule the beef to be unfit for human food.

Evidence obtained by FSIS indicates Hallmark/Westland did not consistently contact the public health veterinarians in situations in which some cattle became non-ambulatory after passing ante-mortem inspection. The animals in question should have been identified as "suspect" requiring additional inspection after slaughter to determine if there is evidence of disease, injury, or other signs of abnormalities.

This massive scale of the recall stems from this type of noncompliant activity that occurred occasionally over the past two years. Therefore all beef product produced during the period of time for which evidence indicates the violations occurred must be determined by FSIS to be unfit for human consumption. The prohibition of downer cattle from entering the food supply is only one measure in multiple safeguards regarding in an ongoing food BSE surveillance program that began before the confirmation of the first BSE positive cow in the U.S. in 2003.

Not only does the U.S. beef industry support the FSIS decision to initiate the Class II recall, it stands strongly against any form of animal mistreatment. Ranchers and cattle feeders across the country work hard to follow member-developed Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) guidelines (see [www.mtbqa.org](http://www.mtbqa.org)) for the care and handling of animals. Cattlemen literally have written the book on the humane treatment of animals within the beef production system.

Punishment for lack of enforcement must be swift and strong in this and other cases of animal maltreatment. We support continued investigations to determine if the systems to enforce animal treatment laws can be strengthened to ensure that these incidents do not occur in the future.

Industry data gained through a series Beef Quality Audits indicate beef producers have made significant reductions in the number of non-ambulatory cattle arriving at processing plants. The 2007 Market Cow and Bull Beef Quality Audit found less than 1.5% of the supply of dairy cattle and approaching 0% of the supply of beef cattle shipped for processing are non-ambulatory. Therefore, prohibition of downer cattle at the processing level should not cause undue burden on our processing partners.

We have two expectations when our cattle leave our farms and ranches: that our animals are treated humanely, and that every step is taken to produce safe and wholesome beef. Again, we support USDA's actions to enforce the laws that ensure our cattle are handled with care and that our beef is produced safely.