

CASTLE APPLAUDES USDA ANNOUNCEMENT ON DOWNED ANIMALS--May 21, 2008

Says Legislation May Still Be Needed

Washington, DC -- Congressman Michael N. Castle (R-DE) praised U.S. Department of Agriculture for announcing Tuesday that there would be a complete ban on meat plant slaughter of cows too sick to stand, also known as "downer" cattle. This effectively closes a loophole that has allowed downer livestock to enter the food supply if they were healthy enough to pass initial inspections, but were too weak to stand upon slaughter.

"I welcome Secretary Schafer's announcement, and hope Congress acts to further the protections to prohibit unhealthy animals from entering our food supply" said Castle. "Legislation may still be necessary to enforce these new regulations."

The Secretary's announcement was in response to claims that downer livestock were being used by the Westland/Hallmark Meat Packing Company, who was a supplier to the National School Lunch Program. A 143 million pound beef recall followed these allegations of abuse. Many school districts across the country received beef from Westland, including schools in Delaware, and the company was removed as a supplier to the national program.

"The current rule, which focuses on cattle that went down after they have already passed pre-slaughter inspection, has been challenging to communicate and has, at times, been confusing to consumers," said Ed Schafer, the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture. "To maintain consumer confidence in the food supply, eliminate further misunderstanding of the rule and, ultimately, to make a positive impact on the humane handling of cattle, I believe it is sound policy to simplify this matter by initiating a complete ban on the slaughter of downer cattle that go down after initial inspection."

Congressman Mike Castle, who has a longtime record of defending humane treatment of animals and ensuring food safety, is a cosponsor of H.R. 661, the Downed Animal and Food Safety Protection Act, which seeks to prohibit downer livestock from being used for human food and would require that these animals be immediately and humanely euthanized. To learn more about Congressman Castle's record, please visit www.castle.house.gov.

###