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# News Release

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## **Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack Announces Final Rule for Handling of Non-Ambulatory Cattle**

WASHINGTON, March 14, 2009 – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced a final rule to amend the federal meat inspection regulations to require a complete ban on the slaughter of cattle that become non-ambulatory disabled after passing initial inspection by Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) inspection program personnel.

The final rule amends the federal meat inspection regulations to require that all cattle that are non-ambulatory disabled ("downer") cattle at any time prior to slaughter at an official establishment, including those that become non-ambulatory disabled after passing ante-mortem inspection, be condemned and properly disposed of according to FSIS regulations. Additionally, the final rule requires that establishments notify inspection program personnel when cattle become non-ambulatory disabled after passing the ante-mortem, or pre-slaughter, inspection. The rule will enhance consumer confidence in the food supply and improve the humane handling of cattle.

"President Obama has strongly stated his support for efforts to improve food safety," said Vilsack. "This rule is designed to enhance consumer confidence and humane handling standards and will provide clear guidance that non-ambulatory cattle will not be allowed to enter the human food supply. It is a step forward for both food safety and the standards for humane treatment of animals. "

Under the final rule, cattle that become non-ambulatory disabled from an acute injury after ante-mortem inspection will no longer be eligible to proceed to slaughter as "U.S. Suspects." Instead, FSIS inspectors will tag these cattle as "U.S. Condemned" and prohibit these cattle from proceeding to slaughter. Discontinuing the case-by-case disposition of cattle that become non-ambulatory disabled after ante mortem inspection will eliminate the time FSIS Public Health Veterinarians spend conducting additional inspections on these animals, thereby increasing the time inspection program personnel can allocate to other inspection activities. With this final rule, these cattle now must be humanely euthanized.

On July 13, 2007, FSIS published the final rule, "Prohibition of the Use of Specified Risk Materials for Human Food and Requirements for the Disposition of Non-Ambulatory Disabled Cattle; Prohibition of the Use of Certain Stunning Devices Used To Immobilize Cattle During Slaughter" (the SRM final rule). The SRM final rule allowed a case-by-case reinspection of cattle that became non-ambulatory disabled after ante mortem inspection to address the rare situations in which an animal that is deemed by FSIS as fit for human food at ante-mortem inspection subsequently suffers an acute injury.

For further information, contact Dr. Daniel Engeljohn, Deputy Assistant Administrator, Office of Policy and Program Development, FSIS, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW., Washington, DC 20250, or by phone at (202) 205-0495.

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