August 13, 2019

Mr. Greg Ibach
Under Secretary for Marketing & Regulatory Programs
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dr. Mindy Brashears
Deputy Under Secretary for Food Safety
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Under Secretary Ibach and Dr. Brashears:

As you are aware, the fire-induced closing of the Tyson beef processing plant in Kansas is causing considerable disruption to the cattle industry. Operating at approximately 6,000 head per day, it represents six percent of the total U.S. fed cattle processing capacity and 23.5 percent of Kansas processing capacity. Loss of this plant adds considerable uncertainty to our industry and has resulted in major cattle market losses and a scramble to find a place for the cattle scheduled to go to the Tyson plant. This is a major burden to America’s cattle producers, and we appreciate your engagement thus far in finding ways to accommodate the industry’s needs.

According to CattleFax, in order to compensate for the loss of capacity at Holcomb, the major packing plants in Texas, Kansas, Colorado, Nebraska, and Iowa, which represent 83 percent of U.S. fed slaughter capacity, would need to slaughter 8.2 percent more cattle per week, or run 3.3 more hours per week, to make up the production lost in Holcomb. While we expect other processing facilities to take more cattle, the shortfall created by the Holcomb fire will be incredibly difficult to make up based on the current packing infrastructure. As the industry looks for ways to minimize the damages caused by Holcomb, we ask that USDA work with industry to accommodate the inspection and grading needs associated with processing the cattle coming to market. This flexibility will need to remain until the Tyson plant reopens.

We request that APHIS and FSIS inspectors, along with AMS graders, be provided the flexibility needed to move to other plants and work expanded shift hours, including weekends, in order to help the packing segment of our industry process the cattle headed to harvest. We also ask that the federal inspection workforce be prepared to work efficiently as possible to maximize remaining plant capacity and shift time. Finally, we ask that Packers and Stockyards Division staff remain vigilant against any effort to illegally capitalize on the current market situation.

We appreciate your continued strong support and commitment to the food safety inspection system and thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

Colin Woodall
Senior Vice President – Government Affairs