

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

GREG GIANFORTE
GOVERNOR



KRISTEN JURAS
LT. GOVERNOR

August 2, 2021

Secretary Tom Vilsack
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Jefferson Drive SW
Washington, D.C. 20024

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

On behalf of Montana's cattle ranchers, I write to you today regarding anticipated delays in the approval of export certificates by the United States Department of Agriculture USDA-Veterinary Services (USDA-VS) Endorsement Office for Montana livestock being exported to Canada.

In the face of severe drought affecting the northwestern United States, our producers are experiencing a shortage of forage leading to significant early marketing of cows and calves. Unfortunately, sellers are now anticipating a three-to-four-day processing time for export certificates due to a retirement in the USDA-VS Endorsement Office in Idaho and lack of experience in the Washington state office. This is a substantial, burdensome increase in processing time from the same-day endorsements many of our exporters are accustomed to.

These export delays will create additional feed costs for our producers and increase the opportunity for disease events, threatening the viability of family ranches. Additionally, cattle in Montana are often sold through livestock commission companies with sales on a tight schedule. If cattle are required to remain at a facility from prior sales, that will limit the facility's capacity to hold incoming animals, increase yard fees, and further increase the cost of exportation.

Each of these issues is further exacerbated by the severe, extreme, or exceptional drought conditions facing producers in 80-percent of our state.

To support Montana producers during this unprecedented drought year, I request that USDA-VS take immediate action to shorten the time to endorse export certificates to less than 24 hours following receipt of appropriate documentation. I also ask that your headquarters offers extended hours to accommodate the needs of western states at an Endorsement Office in the Pacific Time Zone, particularly when processing times are longer than 24 hours.

Please contact Mike Honeycutt, Executive Officer of the Montana Department of Livestock, at 406-444-0528 at your earliest availability to resolve this issue affecting ranching families and rural communities throughout Montana.

Sincerely,



Greg Gianforte
Governor

cc: Mark Remick, DVM, National Director Veterinary Export Trade Services, APHIS, USDA