

USDA Responds To South Dakota Producers' Concerns

WASHINGTON, July 16, 1999 -- Rapid response teams from the U.S. Department of Agriculture will be in South Dakota next week to respond to growing concerns of cattle and hog producers that packers allegedly are violating the federal Packers and Stockyards Act since enactment of South Dakota's new mandatory livestock price reporting law on July 1.

The teams, dispatched by Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs Michael V. Dunn, are designed to deal with high priority investigations that require expeditious examination and analysis to prevent or minimize major competitive or financial harm caused by ongoing violations of the P & S Act.

"Any indication that South Dakota producers are being treated illegally will be promptly and vigorously investigated," said Dunn. "We've received a lot of calls since July 1 regarding this issue. These teams will be out there, on the ground, talking to producers, to help us determine if violations of the Packers and Stockyards Act have taken place."

"The Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration's is responsible for enforcing the Act," said James R. Baker, administrator of GIPSA. "We will use all resources available to respond to the concerns of producers. If we uncover any evidence that South Dakota sellers are being boycotted, we will investigate immediately and thoroughly."

GIPSA's rapid response teams will be in Sioux Falls, Brookings, and Mitchell and to talk with producers on an individual basis July 20 to 23. Cattle and hog producers can meet with USDA officials at the Radisson Encore Inn in Sioux Falls, July 20 and 21. Hog producers can meet with USDA officials at the Holiday Inn in Mitchell, July 22. Cattle producers can meet with USDA officials July 22 and 23 at the Holiday Inn in Brookings. Officials will be available from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Producers who have complaints are encouraged to meet privately with the government officials and are encouraged to bring documentation and any pertinent information along with them to support their allegations. The teams will consist of both Packers and Stockyards officials and attorneys from USDA's Office of General Counsel.

Cattle producers can call GIPSA's Denver regional office at 303 375-4240 for more information. Hog producers can call GIPSA's Des Moines regional office at 515 323-2579 for additional information.