

USDA chief rejects 'downer cow' ban

by UPI

WASHINGTON - U.S. Agriculture Secretary Ed Schafer has told Congress he would not endorse an outright ban on so-called downer cows entering the food supply. Schafer told a Senate Appropriations subcommittee hearing Thursday he also would not back stiffer penalties for regulatory violations by meat-processing plants following the largest beef recall in the U.S. history, the Washington Post reported. Current rules, he said, are "adequate." Schafer said the agency was seeking to determine why the USDA had missed inhumane treatment of cattle at the Westland/Hallmark Meat Co., in Chino, Calif., where a video showed workers applying electric shocks and water sprays to downer cows, those too sick or weak to stand without help. Agriculture officials subsequently ordered the recall of 143 million pounds of beef processed by Westland/Hallmark including 37 million pounds that had gone to school lunch and other public nutrition programs. No illnesses have been linked to the recalled meat. Schafer announced interim steps including more random inspections of slaughterhouses and more frequent unannounced audits of the nearly two dozen plants that process meat for federal school lunch programs.

Â© 2008 United Press International. All Rights Reserved.

USDA chief rejects 'downer cow' ban by UPI