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NEWS RELEASE

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USDA INFORMS IDAHO OF LIKELY CHANGE TO 'CLASS A' STATUS FOR BRUCELLOSIS

(BOISE) The Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) has learned that Idaho will likely be designated a Brucellosis "Class A" state by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), a reduction from the "Brucellosis-Free" status the state has enjoyed since 1991. The reduction in status will likely occur in early January 2006. ISDA is considering its options, including its right to appeal USDA's decision.

Class A status will require increased testing of certain cattle that move out of Idaho. At a minimum, all intact male and female cattle over 18 months of age that are not going directly to slaughter will have to be tested for brucellosis before they can be shipped out of state. Additionally, cattle herds in eastern Idaho that have contact with wild elk in the winter time and are identified as "high-risk" by ISDA will be required to be tested for brucellosis. Such a testing regimen will increase costs for Idaho's cattle producers.

A reduction in brucellosis status is no cause for concern about the safety of meat and milk products from Idaho.

"It is highly unlikely for humans to get brucellosis from consuming meat or dairy products," said Dr. Greg Ledbetter, ISDA Division of Animal Industries administrator. "That is because cooking the meat and pasteurization of milk destroys the organism."

The main risk for humans to get brucellosis is through direct contact with placental or fetal fluids from infected animals, and that risk applies almost entirely to people who work with cattle, not beef consumers, said Ledbetter.

USDA Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) complimented ISDA veterinarians for their "aggressive and immediate" response to an identified brucellosis case in eastern Idaho. But APHIS officials say federal regulations are inflexible once a second herd with a brucellosis reactor is discovered, and the federal government is required to reduce the state's status.

The change in designation follows the October discovery of brucellosis in a Swan Valley cattle herd. Later, a virgin heifer from that herd was traced to a small feedlot near Arco.

While ISDA said the reactor heifer in the small feedlot should be considered part of the original herd, APHIS disagreed and determined that the small feedlot was a second

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brucellosis infected herd. The discovery of a second herd triggered the change in Idaho's status to Class A.

Additionally, ISDA disagrees with APHIS' assessment that brucellosis would have been transmitted by a virgin heifer to any of the other 17 cattle in the small Arco feedlot which had all been vaccinated and tested negative for brucellosis and were sent to slaughter in early December 2005.

"Idaho and other states in the Greater Yellowstone Area have a challenge to maintain Brucellosis-Free status, but with extra care we managed to keep the status in place for more than a decade," ISDA Director Pat Takasugi said. "We will continue our vigilance, and we ask cattle owners to do the same. Our veterinarians will continue to work with APHIS and the cattle industry to regain Brucellosis-Free status."

Takasugi said he appreciates how the cattle industry has been cooperating with ISDA on this matter.

Idaho can apply to regain its Brucellosis-Free status if no new cases emerge after one year.

It is believed that bison and elk in the Greater Yellowstone Area are the predominate source of the *Brucella* bacteria in the region.

The disease primarily affects cattle, elk and bison. An infection in these animals can result in spontaneous abortion, decreased milk production, weight loss, infertility and lameness.

Idaho Code 25-613A says "all female cattle in the state of Idaho shall be officially vaccinated for protection against brucellosis" and that female cattle that have not been officially vaccinated "shall not be utilized for breeding, grazing or dairying purposes."

Idaho State Department of Agriculture rules further specify that "female cattle and domestic bison native to the state of Idaho or imported into the state of Idaho shall be calfhood vaccinated while not less than one hundred twenty (120) days of age or more than three-hundred sixty-five (365) days of age or be consigned to an approved feedlot, for finish feeding for slaughter only, prior to becoming three hundred sixty-five (365) days of age." Additionally there is a provision for the vaccination of adult cattle and domestic bison.

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