

 **STATEMENT**

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Release No. 0025.08

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**STATEMENT BY AGRICULTURE SECRETARY ED SCHAFFER REGARDING THE
HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES' HANDLING ALLEGATIONS**

January 30, 2008

"I am deeply concerned about the allegations made regarding inhumane handling of non-ambulatory disabled cattle in a federally inspected slaughter establishment.

"We are confident in our inspection system and the food safety regulations that ensure the safety and wholesomeness of the food supply. Among the federal safeguards in place, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) prohibits non-ambulatory disabled cattle and cattle tissue identified as specified risk materials for use in human food.

"I have called on the Office of the Inspector General to work with FSIS and the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) to conduct an investigation into this matter. As a result of the investigation, any violations of food safety or humane handling laws will be immediately acted upon.

"While we are conducting our investigation, today, USDA has indefinitely suspended Westland Meat Company as a supplier to Federal food and nutrition programs. Westland Meat Company will not be permitted to produce or deliver any products currently under contract. Under the suspension, no further contracts will be awarded to Westland Meat Company. The suspension will remain in effect until all investigations are complete and appropriate action is taken by the Department. An administrative hold has been placed on all Westland Meat Products that are in, or destined for Federal food and nutrition programs.

"It is unfortunate that the Humane Society of the United States did not present this information to us when these alleged violations occurred in the fall of 2007. Had we known at the time the alleged violations occurred, we would have initiated our investigation sooner, and taken appropriate actions at that time."

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