

Cattle Rancher Warns About the Meat You're Buying

Analysis by [Dr. Joseph Mercola](#) ✓ Fact Checked

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › American cattle rancher Shad Sullivan from North Texas was interviewed by host Patrick Bet-David about the future of the cattle and beef industry
- › Sullivan received an email from the USDA in April 2020, stating that it would help farmers to find alternative markets for their harvests, as COVID-19 caused meat processing plants to shut down
- › If alternative markets couldn't be found, state veterinarians and government officials would assist with culls, or depopulation, of the animals; meanwhile, the U.S. continues to import beef from other countries
- › Due to the allowance of acquisitions and mergers, four companies — Tyson, Cargill, JBS and National Beef, which is owned by Marfrig Global Foods — control 85% of the U.S. beef supply
- › There are now 727,906 beef farms and ranches in the U.S. In 1979, Sullivan says, there were 1.2 million to 1.3 million; he believes that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, one-third of the remaining beef farms and ranches in the U.S. may disappear after 2020 — maybe more

This article was previously published January 2, 2021, and has been updated with new information.

In the video above, American cattle rancher Shad Sullivan from North Texas is interviewed by host Patrick Bet-David about the future of the cattle and meat industry.

In April 2020, Sullivan posted a YouTube video¹ discussing how U.S. farmers are being forced to dump the food supply – plowing under vegetable crops, euthanizing millions of chickens, aborting sows and burying feeder pigs, and dumping milk by the hundreds of thousands of gallons. While YouTube has since taken down the video, it continues to be "live" on private websites.

In the video, Sullivan says officials from the U.S. Department of Agriculture were also preparing farmers to depopulate cattle that were ready to harvest due to a "bottleneck created by the effects of COVID and the logistics therein." Yet, while preparing U.S. cattle ranchers to cull their herds, the U.S. was actively importing beef from other countries.

The first shipment of beef from Namibia, for instance, arrived in the U.S. in April 2020, prompting Sullivan to ask, "Am I the only one that sees a problem in this? ... We are importing beef from other countries. Beef that is less regulated than our beef, less safe, not as high-quality of product, and yet, it's happening. At the same time, they're preparing for us to euthanize our harvests."²

USDA Email Told Farmers It Would Assist in Depopulation

Sullivan received an email from the USDA in April 2020, stating that it would help farmers to find alternative markets for their harvests, and if that couldn't be done, state veterinarians and government officials would assist with culls, or depopulation, of the animals.

In May 2020, the USDA announced that its Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) had established a National Incident Coordination Center that would support producers who could not move their animals due to the closing of processing plants because of COVID-19.

"Going forward," the announcement stated, "APHIS' Coordination Center, State Veterinarians, and other state officials will be assisting to help identify potential alternative markets if a producer is unable to move animals, and if necessary, advise and assist on depopulation and disposal methods."³

As processing plants shut down across the U.S. near the beginning of the pandemic, farmers were forced to euthanize hundreds of thousands of animals, a waste of meat during a time when many were struggling to find food, and a sentence that caused emotional and economic damage to farmers.

Because the processing is concentrated into a small number of large facilities, a U.S. government statement noted at the time, "[C]losure of any of these plants could disrupt our food supply and detrimentally impact our hardworking farmers and ranchers."⁴

The government also cited statistics that closing one large beef processing plant could lead to a loss of more than 10 million servings of beef in a day, and noted that closing one processing plant can eliminate more than 80% of the supply of a given meat product, such as ground beef, to an entire grocery store chain.⁵ These highlight the glaring problems that come along with a highly concentrated and centralized food system.

Four Companies Control 85% of the Beef Cattle Supply Chain

Due to the allowance of acquisitions and mergers, four companies – Tyson, Cargill, JBS and National Beef, which is owned by Marfrig Global Foods – control the majority of the U.S. beef supply. These companies are multinational corporations that act as processors and distributors of beef. Decades ago, according to Sullivan, there may have been 800 different processors of beef, where now there are only four.

By taking away all competition, they've taken control of the entire industry. In April 2019, Tyson, Cargill, JBS and National Beef were accused of violating federal antitrust law by colluding to drive down the price of cattle they bought from ranchers while boosting retail prices, in order to boost profits.⁶

According to the lawsuit, which was filed by the Ranchers Cattlemen Action Legal Fund United Stockgrowers of America (R-CALF), the companies "engaged in tactics – including purchasing fewer cattle than a competitive market would otherwise demand and running their processing plants at less than available capacity" – that had the end

result of creating surpluses in the cattle market but shortages in the wholesale beef market.⁷

"There's an oligarchy of power and control at the top of the chain," Sullivan said, "and that trickles down to you ... They are able to eliminate competition in the United States while bringing in cheaper, lower quality meat from other countries." In 2020, the U.S. imported beef from at least 19 countries, including Nicaragua, Japan, Croatia, Lithuania and Chile.

Product of the USA Doesn't Mean It's From the US

The original Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) rule, which was approved in 2002 and took effect in 2008, required the country of origin to be listed on meat labels. In 2013, the COOL rule was improved and meat packages were supposed to be required to label where the animal that provided your meat was born, raised and slaughtered.

At the time, industrial meat producers like Tyson, Cargill and the National Cattlemen's Beef Association were among those who spoke out against the rule, calling it unnecessarily costly and "short-sighted," while fearing it would shrink demand for imported meat.

Unfortunately for U.S. consumers seeking greater transparency in their food sources, the meat giants needn't have worried because global dictators stepped in and essentially told consumers they don't have the right to know.

In 2015, the World Trade Organization ruled U.S. law requiring COOL labels on meat was illegal, as it discriminated against Canadian and Mexican meat companies and gave an advantage to U.S. meat producers.⁸ By removing COOL, multinational companies are allowed to pass off imported meat as U.S.-raised, while U.S. farmers suffer.

As long as it's processed in a U.S. facility, it can be labeled "Product of USA"⁹ – even if that processing involves nothing more than unwrapping and rewrapping the package, or cutting a piece of meat into smaller pieces.

The National Cattleman's Beef Association, a cattle industry lobbying group, continues to push back against mandatory COOL, as processors don't want the added expense of having to differentiate and label meats from different origins. R-CALF USA, which represents independent cattle producers, is fighting for mandatory COOL, calling it an individual right and liberty issue.

But "it's a pay-to-play system," Sullivan says. "The packers pay to sit on the board of directors and then they're required to play how the packers want." When asked how much similarity there is with pharmaceutical lobbyists and lobbyists in the meat industry, Sullivan says, "Very similar ... it's all about money, power and control. Lobbying is power."

It's Nearly Impossible for Next Generation to Raise Cattle

There are now 727,906 beef farms and ranches in the U.S. In 1979, Sullivan says, there were 1.2 million to 1.3 million. The dramatic decline is the result of a gradual disappearance because of the lack of competition throughout the industry. As more acquisitions and mergers occur, small farms disappear. Meanwhile, expenses are on the rise, and, without competition in the marketplace, profits fall.

Bet-David asked Sullivan if he would be able to "sell" someone on getting into the industry today, and Sullivan said, "It's financially impossible." An individual looking to get into the cattle industry would be faced with the high cost of land, startup costs and overhead, for slight profits, if any, making it a losing proposition for most, especially without a lot of extra cash to pull from.

Currently, Sullivan says he spends \$1,200 per animal for a \$900 return. "And therefore, across America, we have seen hundreds of thousands of youth not return to the family operation after high school or college." Sullivan believes that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, one-third of the remaining beef farms and ranches in the U.S. may disappear after 2020 – maybe more.

As more farms and ranches shut down, the industry becomes even more concentrated. One thing that can help U.S. farmers is to support mandatory COOL. According to the

American Grassfed Association (AGA), "U.S. cattle producers received higher prices for their cattle when the origins of foreign beef was distinguished in the marketplace."¹⁰

As it stands, Americans may be eating imported meat that came from a country with lower standards for their meat, but they have no way of knowing it. This is even true for grass fed beef, about 80% of which is imported into the U.S. from other countries that can produce it at a lower cost.¹¹ It's a food safety issue, according to Sullivan:

"The consumer doesn't know where that food safety issue lies. They need to have the choice to do that. And if I'm gone as an individual producer, who fills my shoes now, in this time and age? Nobody.

Only multinational corporations, the conglomerates, the control ... We have the highest quality beef supply ... we've spent the last 150 years improving our herds. We want that to be differentiated from those people who have not worked so hard to be in the U.S. market."

Regenerative Farming Has Saved Farmers

One way cattle farmers have differentiated themselves in these difficult times is by converting to grass fed, regenerative farming. Allen Williams, Ph.D., a sixth-generation family farmer,¹² has consulted with more than 4,200 farmers and ranchers in the U.S. on soil health, cover-cropping, livestock integration, grazing management and other regenerative agriculture practices.

Many of the farmers and ranchers Allen has worked with over the past 20 years were in deep distress, trying to farm and ranch conventionally, and failing. Many of them were on the brink of losing their farms, which had been in the family for generations. By teaching them regenerative land¹³ management techniques, many of them were able to rebuild and prosper financially. In a previous interview with me, he said.

"The average age of farmers and ranchers across the U.S. are people in their 60s and early 70s. So, we desperately need the younger generation to return to the land, and these regenerative practices allow them to have that opportunity

to return and to do it in profitable and viable manner where they can support their young and growing families."

Regenerative farming pioneer Will Harris,¹⁴ who runs White Oak Pastures in Bluffton, Georgia, is another example of how you can accomplish the conversion from conventional to regenerative agriculture and thrive financially. He produces high-quality grass fed products, including beef and other animal products.

The Grassfed Exchange is one resource for ranchers, who can learn how to produce the highest quality beef using 100% grass-based production models.¹⁵

Supporting the Processing Revival and Intrastate Meat Exemption (PRIME) Act,¹⁶ introduced by Rep. Thomas Massie, R-Ky., and cosponsored by Rep. Chellie Pingree, D-Maine, is also beneficial, as it would allow farmers to sell meat processed at smaller slaughtering facilities and allow states to set their own meat processing standards.

Because small slaughterhouses do not have an inspector on staff, a requirement that only large facilities can easily fulfill, they're banned from selling their meat. The PRIME Act would lift this regulation without sacrificing safety, as random USDA inspections could still occur.¹⁷

On an individual level, the best way to support U.S. farmers is to seek out locally produced food as much as possible, including grass fed beef, and buy it directly from the farm or a farmers market whenever you can.