

Texas is 'Shocked' by Chipotle Imports of Aussie Beef

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — The Texas agriculture commissioner on Monday aired a beef with Chipotle Mexican Grill and wants to talk with its founder after the company decided to import grass-fed beef from Australia.

Commissioner Todd Staples in a letter dated Monday says it is "misguided" and "irresponsible" for Chipotle founder Steve Ells to believe that Australian meat is raised more responsibly than cattle in Texas, the nation's leading producer, or other states.

Staples wrote he was "shocked" that Chipotle is getting beef from 8,000 miles away when there are producers galore in Texas.

"We have a wide variety of producers and processors," he wrote. "It seems foolish to discount these immense, local resources when making decisions about where to source your beef."

Ells last month defended the move by writing for the Huffington Post that Chipotle was having difficulty getting beef it prefers from U.S. producers because the lingering drought is leading to the smallest herd in decades.

The U.S. Agriculture Department said in January that the U.S. cattle herd was 89.3 million head, the lowest since 1952.

Chipotle spokesman Chris Arnold said the low US herd numbers mean there are fewer animals that meet the company protocol of using no hormones or antibiotics.

"It would be our preference to get that domestically but it's just not available," he said.

Staples says he wants Ells to meet with him and Texas beef industry leaders.

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