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From Newsletter Page 2 – 04/18/08

Opposition to U.S. and European biofuels policies is growing as political leaders in poor countries blame production of the fuels for driving up food prices and starving poor people, according to the *New York Times*.

The *Times* reported that research by the International Food Policy Research Institute in Washington, D.C. indicates that biofuels production is responsible for a quarter to a third of the recent increase in global commodity prices. There are other factors contributing to food cost inflation including droughts, rapid global economic growth that has created higher demand for food, and rising energy costs. Still, University of Minnesota economist C. Ford Runge told the *Times*, "Ethanol is the one thing we can do something about. It's about the only lever we have to pull, but none of the politicians have the courage to pull the lever."

The *Times* said support for ethanol remains solid in Washington despite criticism from abroad. But U.S. Rep. Jim McGovern (D-Mass.) indicated that he is not alone as a Congressman who believes the government has made a mistake by backing biofuels.

"If there was a secret vote, there is a pretty large number of people who would like to reassess what we are doing," said McGovern.

U.S. beef exports posted solid gains over the previous year during the first two months of 2008, according to USDA data compiled by USMEF.

"The growth engine for the U.S. meat industry will continue to be the export market," said USMEF President Phillip M. Seng. "The weakened U.S. dollar, competitive pricing for U.S. exports and declining production by some of our competitors combine to create conditions that support continued growth internationally."

Over January and February, exports of U.S. beef muscle cuts increased to 168.5 million lbs., up 36% over the same two month period in 2007. Beef variety meat exports were up 17% to a total of 118 million lbs.

USMEF's report shows Mexico continuing to be the largest destination for U.S. beef products with exports of beef and beef variety meats up 21% to 143.9 million lbs. Canada, the number two U.S. beef export market, took in 46.6 million lbs., a 66% increase. And, exports to Japan were up 25% to 14.9 million lbs.

There is also good news concerning Russia. *Meatingplace.com* reports four more U.S. beef processors have become eligible to export to Russia: Cargill Meat Solutions' Fort Morgan, Colo. plant; the JBS-Swift facility in Grand Island, Neb.; and Smithfield Beef Group's operations in Tolleson, Ariz. and Green Bay, Wis.