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HEADLINE: Beef Expert: Oprah Guest Unqualified

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DATELINE: AMARILLO, Texas

BODY:

A veterinary expert for **cattlemen** who are suing Oprah Winfrey said today that a guest on her talk show didn't have the proper background to say that U.S. beef could spread a deadly disease.

Dr. **Lester Crawford**, who testified Friday that vegetarian activist Howard Lyman made false statements on the program, returned to the stand and continued criticizing some of the comments that led to this beef defamation lawsuit.

Today, Crawford targeted a segment of the show that plaintiff's attorneys have often cited: Lyman agreeing when Ms. Winfrey asked on her show if an outbreak of mad cow disease in the United States could make AIDS look like the common cold.

"I don't believe he said it was an opinion. He stated it as fact," said Crawford, a former head of the U.S. Food Safety Inspection Service.

On Friday, after defense attorneys unsuccessfully argued that Crawford was not a specialist on mad cow disease, he told jurors that Lyman lied about the condition of U.S. cattle used for beef and about feeding practices.

A group of Texas **cattlemen** are suing Ms. Winfrey, her production company and Lyman for more than \$10 million because they say the April 16, 1996, show violated a state law against falsely disparaging Texas agriculture and food products.

The **cattlemen** allege Ms. Winfrey favored alarming statements by Lyman who has a college degree in agriculture but no scientific credentials over pro-beef statements.

On Wednesday, defense attorney Charles Babcock challenged two Chicago Mercantile Exchange futures traders who blamed the program for the drop in beef futures prices.

Tim Brennan, a board member of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, said an associate phoned him minutes into the show to tell him the first segment was dealing with the chances of U.S. beef carrying mad cow disease.

Before going to a break room to watch the show first-hand, Brennan placed a "sell" order on the floor.

Babcock chided Brennan for deciding to sell before even viewing the program.

"You think (Ms. Winfrey) ought to pay \$10 million because YOU thought what she said would stop housewives from buying hamburgers?" Babcock asked.

"This is true," Brennan responded.

Brennan said he anticipated the already weak cattle market would fall further after the mad cow segment, which he believed was unfair.

In Chicago, the show airs at 9 a.m. Trading on the exchange began at 9:05 a.m., and cattle prices had fallen by \$1.50 per pound by about 10:30 a.m., Brennan said.

Under Merc rules, the price couldn't have fallen further in one day's worth of trading.

The buzz in the cattle trading area at the exchange centered on the show for the rest of the morning and continued into the next

week as prices declined further, Brennan said.

Babcock also played a television news clip from the day after the program in which Brennan appeared to blame the price drop on another factor.

"We're not here because of Oprah Winfrey's segment yesterday. The biggest ingredient is extraordinarily high grain prices," Brennan said on the TV broadcast, which Babcock replayed for jurors.

Brennan later clarified his remarks for plaintiffs' lawyers: "What I was talking about was (price) levels at the time compared to where we were a year ago. 'The Oprah Winfrey Show' was a hammer, an explosive event at the time."

Another trader, Fred Moore, testified that the program caused a flood of selling that morning. He characterized the show's contents as a "gross injustice" to the industry.

The program aired a month after British scientists announced a possible link between mad cow disease, formally known as bovine spongiform encephalopathy, and a similar disorder human might have contracted by eating contaminated beef.

Mad cow disease never has been detected in the United States.

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