

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 22, 2013

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
United States Senate
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow:

As you conference with the House of Representatives on the 2013 Farm Bill, we ask that you accede to provisions in the House-passed Farm Bill (Section 11107 of H.R. 2642) that would eliminate the wasteful and duplicative USDA catfish inspection program.

Out of the 73 amendments the Senate approved as part of the Senate's Farm Bill in 2012 (S. 3240), each was re-added to the Senate's Farm Bill in 2013 except S.Amdt.2199, reintroduced this year as McCain-Shaheen Amendment 956, to eliminate the USDA catfish office. Our amendment was singled out and blocked from having a vote despite its overwhelming support in the Senate. Fortunately, an identical amendment offered by Congresswomen Vicky Hartzler and Lucille Roybal-Allard was added to the House Farm Bill with a recorded vote (31-15) in the House Agriculture Committee.

As a reminder, the Government Accountability Office has spoken out against this program on five separate occasions because of the program's duplicative and wasteful nature. The President also opposes the program and proposed to eliminate funding for USDA catfish inspection in his FY2014 budget request. The Office of Management and Budget states that eliminating funding for duplicative catfish inspection at USDA will allow the USDA to be "better able to focus on its core mission of ensuring the safety of the Nation's meat and poultry supply." USDA's own food safety experts declare that catfish, both domestic and imported, is a "low risk" food.

At a time when Congress needs to find places to save money, the USDA catfish inspection program fits the bill for elimination. USDA has estimated that this program will cost \$30 million to set up and \$15 million per year to operate. Currently, the Food and Drug Administration only spends about \$700,000 per year to inspect catfish. Furthermore, implementation of this program would leave us open to dramatic retaliation from many of our trading partners, putting at risk billions of dollars in our national agricultural export industry.

We urge you to keep in mind the economic impact of this program and the bipartisan consensus behind its repeal as you continue Farm Bill conference negotiations. As a matter of good government, we look forward to the repeal of the USDA catfish inspection program once and for all in a final conferenced Farm Bill.

Sincerely,


John McCain
United States Senator


Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator