

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 2, 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:

We write to request that the wasteful and duplicative USDA catfish inspection program be repealed once and for all. With Section 11107 of the House-passed farm program bill eliminating this program, we ask that the Senate agree to the House repeal language.

The full Senate unanimously voted to eliminate the program during last year's Farm Bill consideration (S. 3240, Section 12208, Repeal of Duplicative Program). With that action and the recent passage of the 2013 House Farm Bill including language to repeal the USDA catfish inspection program, we expect the Senate to eliminate this program in conference, consistent with the House position.

As a reminder, the Government Accountability Office has consistently identified this program as rife for waste and duplication. The President also agreed and proposed to eliminate funding for USDA catfish inspection in his FY 2014 budget request. According to the Administration, this repeal would allow USDA to "focus on its core mission of ensuring the safety of the Nation's meat and poultry supply."

USDA's own food safety experts have declared that all catfish, regardless of origin, is a "low risk" food. As such, there is no justification for creating a new program that will only waste taxpayer dollars and federal resources. Additionally, the program will create duplication for anyone in the seafood industry that handles or processes more than catfish. The GAO concluded in its 2012 report, "Responsibility for Inspecting Catfish Should Not Be Assigned to USDA," that the USDA catfish inspection program "would likely not enhance the safety of catfish but would duplicate FDA and NMFS inspections at a cost to taxpayers" (GAO-12-411, p. 25).

Finally, with combination of a discriminatory *de facto* ban on exports from key trading partners and the USDA's assessment that no public health issue is being addressed, all U.S. exports, especially agriculture commodities, will be exposed to trade retaliation. With no scientific evidence or a risk assessment, as required by international trade agreements signed by the U.S. justifying the transfer of catfish from the FDA to the USDA, the former head of the WTO appellate body has stated that the United States is likely to lose a WTO case brought in opposition to the USDA program.

U.S. agricultural exports ARE the engine driving our rural economy, supporting more than 1 million jobs here in the United States. In 2011, during the proposed catfish rule's comment period, 16 agricultural groups and companies¹ submitted comments expressing their serious concerns with the USDA program. These groups, representing America's farmers and ranchers, understand the negative impact that this program will have on their agriculture exports.

We look forward to working with you on repealing this duplicative program during the Farm Bill conference.

Sincerely,



MIKE CRAPO
United States Senator



JAMES E. RISCH
United States Senator

¹ American Soybean Association, Cargill Incorporated, Hormel Foods Corporation, National Council of Farmer Cooperatives, National Meat Association, National Milk Producers Federation, National Oilseed Processors Association, National Pork Producers Council, National Turkey Federation, Seaboard Foods, Smithfield Foods, U.S. Dairy Export Council, U.S. Grains Council, U.S. Meat Export Federation, USA Poultry & Egg Export Council, and Western Growers Association.