

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 11, 2013

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

Dear Senator Stabenow:

We write to reiterate our support for eliminating the USDA catfish inspection program in the version of S. 954, the Agriculture Reform, Food, and Jobs Act of 2013 that emerges from Conference. This program unnecessarily shifts catfish inspection and oversight from the Food and Drug Administration to the Food Safety and Inspection Service within USDA, subjects U.S. businesses to duplicative and needless regulation, and wastes \$170 million over the next decade.

The program is unquestionably a waste of taxpayer dollars. The Government Accountability Office on five separate occasions has concluded that the program is wasteful, subject to fraud and abuse, and responsible for unnecessary fragmentation of U.S. food safety oversight. In 2012, GAO expressly recommended that Congress eliminate the program. More recently, President Obama, in his FY2014 budget, proposed de-funding the program. Secretary Vilsack reports that the program – which has yet to inspect a single fish – has already cost the American people \$16 million.

Further, the USDA program, if it is ever implemented, would subject seafood processors to duplicative regulation – USDA for catfish and FDA for all other seafood. This duplication would impose new compliance costs and obligations on businesses with respect to a food item that the Centers for Disease Control classifies as low risk. USDA itself has acknowledged that there is “substantial uncertainty” that the program will be effective at reducing the scant number of catfish-related illnesses reported every year. There is no justification for robbing legitimate agricultural programs to pay for this sort of nonsense.

The Senate overwhelmingly voted to eliminate the USDA program during last year’s farm bill floor debate. This year a similar amendment to S. 954 was denied a floor vote. The House of Representatives, however, included a provision to repeal this program in its own farm bill passed earlier this year. Thus, both chambers of Congress, when they have taken up the issue, have agreed with the President that the USDA program has no merit. During a time of severe fiscal strain, where the political branches of our Government can agree on a way to save taxpayers \$170 million, we embarrass ourselves if we fail to act.

Duplicative Catfish Program

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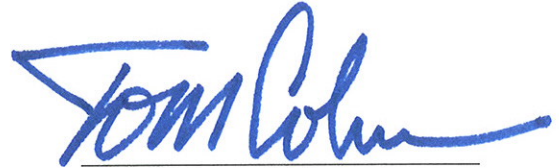
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We therefore urge you to support repeal of the USDA program during the upcoming Conference on S. 954.

Sincerely,



James M. Inhofe
United States Senator



Tom Coburn, M.D.
United States Senator