

December 10, 2013

The Honorable Frank Lucas  
Chairman  
Committee on Agriculture  
U.S. House of Representatives  
1301 Longworth Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Collin Peterson  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Agriculture  
U.S. House of Representatives  
1305 Longworth Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Lucas and Ranking Member Peterson:

On behalf of the Emergency Committee for American Trade (ECAT), I write with respect to the proceedings of the 2013 Farm Bill conference committee, and in particular with respect to the status of the USDA catfish inspection program that was created by the 2008 Farm Bill conference committee.

ECAT is an association of the chief executives of leading U.S. business enterprises with global operations, which was founded more than four decades ago to promote economic growth through expansionary trade and investment policies. Today, ECAT's members represent all the principal sectors of the U.S. economy – food and agriculture, advanced technology, manufacturing, finance, merchandising, processing, publishing and other services. Their collective annual worldwide sales total over \$3.0 trillion, and they employ more than 6.4 million persons.

The House Committee on Agriculture voted to repeal the catfish program with bipartisan support during its consideration of the Farm Bill in May, 2013. The full House voted in July to repeal the catfish program in passing H.R. 2642, the Federal Agriculture Reform and Risk Management Act of 2013, which includes section 11107 (repeal of duplicative catfish-inspection program). Although the Senate had previously voted to repeal the catfish program in 2012, it did not include such a repeal provision in its version of the 2013 Farm Bill.

I urge House conferees to ensure that section 11107 of the House-engrossed bill is retained in the final conference report. Congress should seize this opportunity to terminate this wasteful program. It is wasteful because it requires a duplicative food-inspection program specifically for catfish to be administered by the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), rather than under the general food-inspection mandate of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Indeed, in February the Government Accountability Office concluded that the catfish program “would result in duplication of federal programs and cost taxpayers millions of dollars annually without enhancing the safety of catfish intended for human consumption.” There is simply no reasonable justification for shifting responsibility for catfish inspection from FDA to FSIS. This program is wasteful, does not enhance consumer safety, and sets a bad example that, if replicated, could adversely impact both U.S. exporters and importers of food and agricultural products.

Moreover, this program is not predicated upon any legitimate scientific basis. U.S. exporters of food and agricultural products have fought against scientifically unfounded non-tariff barriers to their exports for years, and this program sets a poor precedent for American leadership in that regard. It should, therefore, be repealed.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Calman J. Cohen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "C" and a distinct "J" and "C".

Calman J. Cohen  
President  
Emergency Committee for American Trade