

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 21, 2013

The Honorable Frank Lucas
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture
United States House of Representatives
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture
United States House of Representatives
1305 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Lucas and Ranking Member Peterson:

First, we would like to acknowledge all of your hard work and determination that went into guiding the 2013 Farm Bill to a conference committee. It was no small task, and your dedication has been impressive. Second, we want to stress the importance of insisting on the House-passed language that repeals the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) catfish program is kept in the final conferenced Farm Bill.

As you know, the House Committee on Agriculture repealed this program during the May 15, 2013 consideration of the Farm Bill by a bipartisan vote of 31 yeas to 15 nays. The full House voted to repeal the program when H.R. 2642, the Federal Agriculture Reform and Risk Management Act of 2013, passed by a vote of 218 yeas to 206 nays. Last year, the Senate overwhelmingly voted to repeal the program, with not a single objection. While the Senate, unfortunately, was not given the same opportunity this year to eliminate the program, conference is now the time to repeal this wasteful program once and for all.

As a reminder, the USDA catfish inspection program was created by the 2008 Farm Bill conference with no committee or floor consideration and unnecessarily shifts catfish inspection from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS). This program creates duplication and wastes federal resources and taxpayer dollars in the inspection of commercial seafood. As has been consistently noted, we believe the best course of action is to return the oversight of this seafood item back to the FDA.

The Government Accountability Office has repeatedly stated that this program is "duplicative" and at "high risk" for fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement. In the GAO's most recent report (GAO-13-283) on the USDA catfish inspection program, they conclude that the USDA 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." This is not a food safety issue. USDA acknowledges that catfish, regardless of where it comes from, is considered a "low risk food." Similarly, the GAO found no scientific data supporting the transfer of inspection to the USDA. President Obama agrees and has proposed to eliminate the funding requirement for the USDA catfish inspection program in his FY14 budget, in order for FSIS to "be better able to focus on its core mission of ensuring the safety of the Nation's meat and poultry supply." Given the federal government's current fiscal crises, taxpayer dollars and federal resources can be better spent on other USDA programs.

This program would also create a discriminatory *de facto* ban on exports from key trading partners and expose the U.S. and our exports to retaliation. International trade agreements require the United States to base food safety measures on scientific evidence and an adequate risk assessment. The creation of the USDA catfish inspection program and the transfer of authority from the FDA to the USDA are not based on either scientific evidence or a convincing risk assessment. Trade experts and American agriculture all have serious concerns with the USDA catfish inspection program. During the comment period on the proposed catfish rule, 16 agricultural groups and companies¹ filed comments opposing the implementation of the USDA catfish inspection program. Their comments conclude that this program's implementation: "will result in retaliatory actions . . . against U.S. exports and therefore would harm . . . U.S. national interests." Agriculture exports have been the driving engine of the rural economy. USDA's own data shows that for every \$1 billion in our own agriculture exports, 6,800 Americans were employed, both in direct and indirect activities. Almost one million Americans have jobs because of the ability of our ranchers and farmers to export their \$136.4 billion in products to other countries. Should the program be fully implemented, those exports and American jobs will be at risk of suffering retaliatory actions.

Implementation of the USDA catfish program will force American seafood companies, including processors, wholesalers, and distributors, who handle or process more than catfish to have two sets of federal inspectors overseeing their facilities: one set of inspectors for catfish and another different set of inspectors for all other seafood. This additional regulatory burden would be worth considering if it were expected to result in improved outcomes for American consumers, but USDA's own risk assessment concludes that, at best, the impact of this program on food safety is "unknown," and GAO found no clear food safety benefit in the USDA inspecting catfish.

We want to ensure a safe food supply for all American families. However, we also want to ensure that America's seafood processors are not subject to duplicative regulation and that our farmers and ranchers can continue to access important export markets. We ask that you save \$170 million over ten years and eliminate this wasteful and duplicative program once and for all by ensuring that language repealing the program is included in the final conferenced Farm Bill. This will be consistent with the House Agriculture Committee vote and full House of Representatives vote this year, as well as the unanimous vote by the full Senate last year.

Sincerely,



Vicky Hartzler
Member of Congress

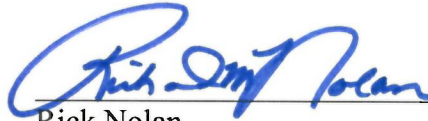


Lucille Roybal-Allard
Member of Congress

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.



Chris Collins
Member of Congress



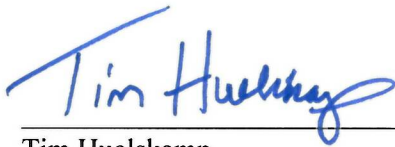
Rick Nolan
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Lynn Westmoreland
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Kurt Schrader
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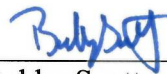
Tim Huelskamp
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Corrine Brown
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Scott Rigell
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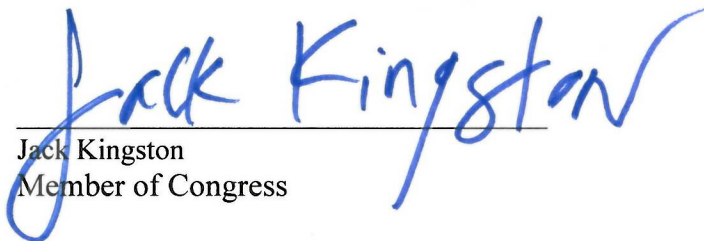
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Marsha Blackburn
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Filemon Vela
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Jack Kingston
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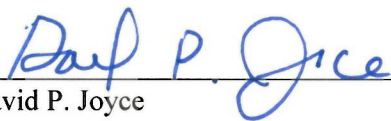
Patrick Murphy
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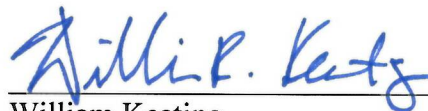
Dennis Ross
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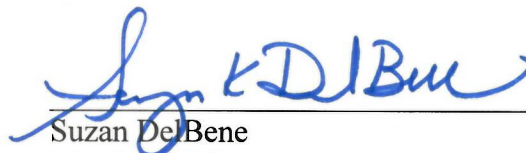
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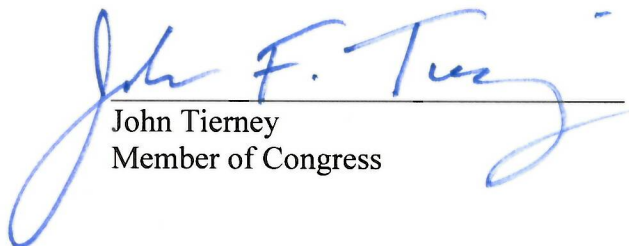
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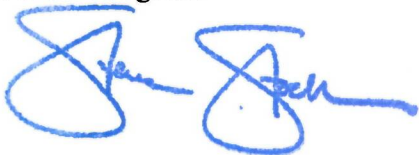
John Tierney
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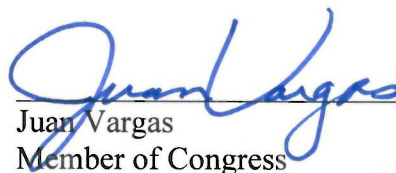
Devin Nunes
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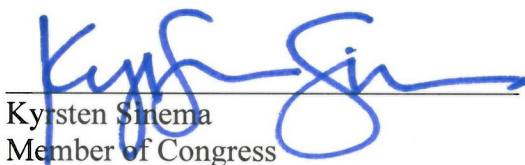
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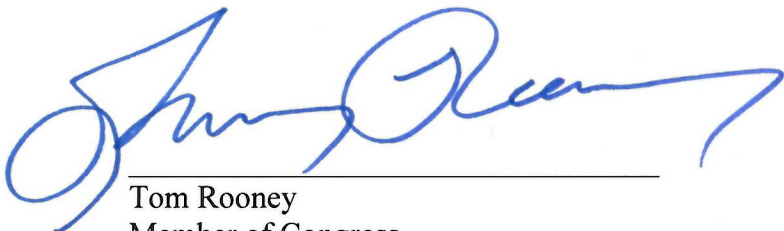
Juan Vargas
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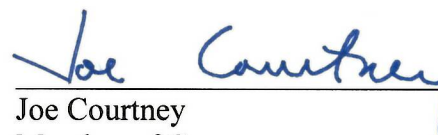
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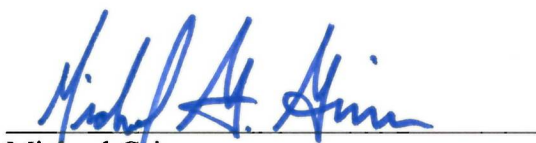

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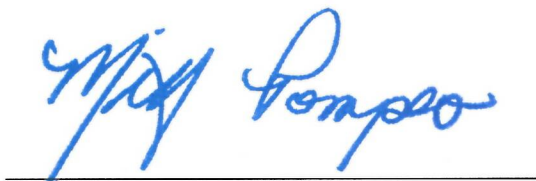

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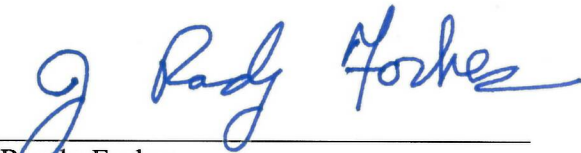

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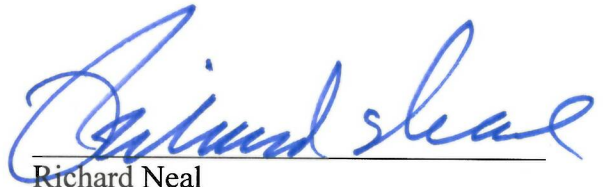

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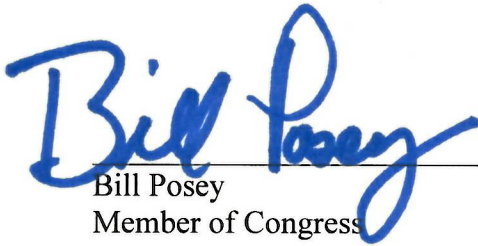
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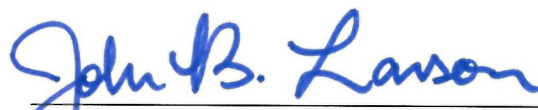
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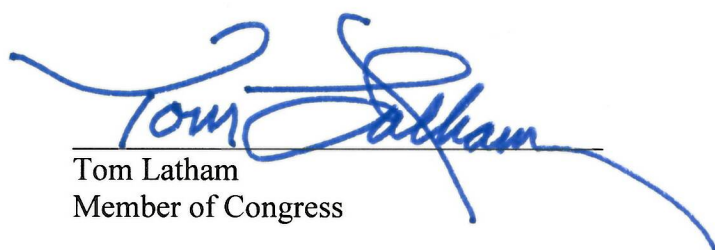
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Dan Benishek
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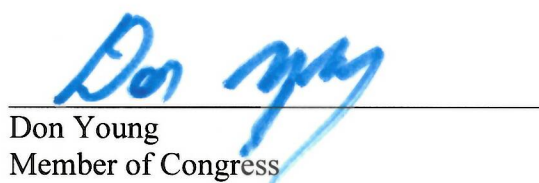
Darrell Issa
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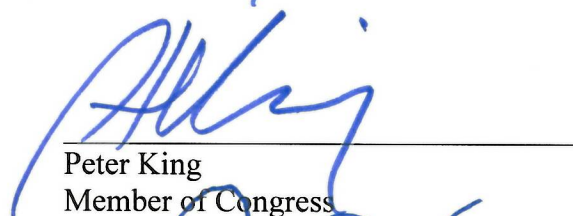
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James Lankford
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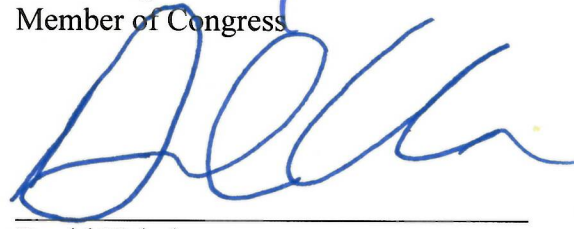
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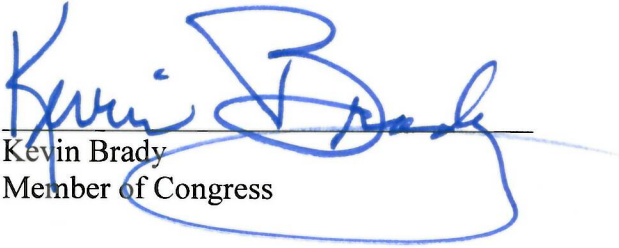


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