



CATFISH FARMERS OF AMERICA
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Dear Senator:

The Catfish Farmers of America would like to bring to your attention an urgent matter of public health and safety.

Last week Alabama Department of Agriculture & Industries Commissioner Ron Sparks renewed a “stop sale” order on imported catfish and catfish-like products from China and Vietnam after tests indicated the fish contained banned drugs that could be dangerous to the health and safety of consumers.

The contaminated catfish products, which had slipped through the Food and Drug Administration’s weak safety net, tested positive for antibiotic fluoroquinolones, which are not allowed for use in fish or other seafood products sold in the United States.

Alabama’s findings underscore ongoing efforts by the Catfish Farmers of America urging USDA to follow Congressional intent and require all imported and domestic catfish to meet the same stringent USDA health and safety standards as beef, poultry and pork. Seafood currently is regulated by the FDA. But last year, the FDA inspected only 2 percent of the 5.2 billion pounds of seafood imported into the United States, according to the Government Accountability Office.

Congress recently moved inspection and regulation of catfish from FDA to USDA in response to evidence of serious quality problems of imported catfish and related fish. USDA Secretary Vilsack, who has made food safety one of his top priorities, is now considering whether to require that all domestic and imported catfish meet USDA standards, or only domestic and Chinese catfish.

His decision has serious consequences for the American consumer. With regards to the recent findings, the Alabama laboratory test results found the high percentages of contamination among the catfish relatives imported from Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia and Thailand in addition to Chinese fish.

In fact, Chinese catfish represented only 29.7 percent of all foreign catfish products imported into the United States in 2008. Imports from Vietnam totaled 52.2 percent of foreign catfish-like products sold in America, and another 12.3 percent were from Thailand. Applying USDA regulations to only Chinese imports will not provide the protection American consumers need.

The contamination found in the Asian fish tested by Alabama authorities demonstrates the urgency of this health and safety issue. We need Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack to enact this law now in the most comprehensive manner possible. It will help ensure that all imported catfish and catfish relatives meet the toughest regulations and inspections that will protect American consumers and ensure that imported fish meet the same standards for quality and safety as our U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish.

Alabama Commissioner Sparks, in announcing the "stop sale" on contaminated imported catfish and related fish in his state, said emphatically that contaminated fish "will never make it to the dinner plates in Alabama."

We believe all Americans should have that same guarantee. Please join us in urging Sec. Vilsack to apply the law as Congress intended and inspect all catfish and related fish imported into the United States. Why should American consumers have to wait one more day for this protection?

Thank you very much for your attention.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joey Lowery". The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized font. The first name "Joey" is written with a long horizontal line extending to the left, and the last name "Lowery" is written in a more compact, cursive style.

Joey Lowery
President
Catfish Farmers of America

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