

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 6, 2009

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
Department of Agriculture
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

As you continue to implement the 2008 Farm Bill, we urge you to support a broad definition of catfish that will ensure that catfish products meet the standards for safety that Americans have come to expect from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

The legislative language in the 2008 Farm Bill leaves no ambiguity in its intent that all catfish, domestic and imported, meet the highest USDA standards – at least equal to the guarantees already accorded to beef and poultry. Like you, we feel strongly about ensuring the health and safety of American consumers.

We fully support the farm bill's intent for a broader definition regarding catfish products that ensures safer fish and more accurate labeling. The American consumer should know that U.S. and imported catfish products have met the most rigorous test for food safety before the product reaches the restaurant or grocery shelf.

We understand that the USDA rulemaking process regarding this issue has begun and request that your office keep us advised as to the schedules for drafting USDA's recommendations, the dates for public commentary and public hearings, and the timeline for promulgating the final regulation.

Thank you in advance for your assistance. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,


Senator Blanche L. Lincoln


Senator Thad Cochran

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 23, 2009

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
Department of Agriculture
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

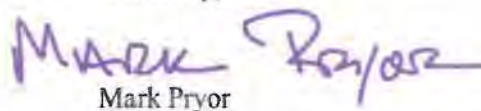
I write to urge you to establish a strong inspection and grading system for catfish. As you implement this system as required by Public Law 110-246 (2008 Farm Bill), you have the opportunity to implement food safety standards that will ensure the safety of all food products marketed and sold as catfish to American consumers at restaurants and retail stores.

Section 11016 of the 2008 Farm Bill requires the Secretary of Agriculture to implement rules for a voluntary grading system and an inspection regime for catfish. These provisions were determined by Congress to be necessary in order to make much needed improvements in food safety for certain aquaculture food products. Specifically, these provisions were designed to deal with a growing influx of potentially tainted aquaculture products that have entered the domestic food supply in recent years and are often marketed and sold as catfish.

Most importantly, Section 11016 provided you the discretion to develop a definition for the term catfish. I believe establishing a broad definition is critical in meeting Congressional intent and ensuring the American public of a safe food supply. American consumers must be confident that the catfish products they buy on the grocery shelf or at the restaurant table have undergone a thorough food safety review and are safe to eat. For these reasons, I encourage you to establish a broad definition of the term catfish that will ensure the safety of all food marketed and sold in the United States as catfish.

It is my understanding that the rulemaking process for this issue is currently underway. I ask that your office keep me advised on the progress of the rulemaking as it moves forward. Thank you for your attention to this request. I look forward to working with you on this and other important matters in the future.

Sincerely,


Mark Pryor

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 3, 2009

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Room 200-A, Jamie L. Whitten Building
12th Street & Jefferson Drive, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

As you continue to implement the 2008 Farm Bill, we urge you to support a broad definition of catfish that will ensure that catfish products meet the standards for safety that Americans have come to expect from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

The legislative language in the 2008 Farm Bill leaves no ambiguity in its intent that all catfish, domestic and imported, meet the highest USDA standards -- at least equal to the guarantees already accorded to beef and poultry. Like you, we feel strongly about ensuring the health and safety of American consumers.

We fully support the farm bill's intent for a broader definition regarding catfish products that ensures safer fish and more accurate labeling. The American consumer should know that U.S. and imported catfish products have met the most rigorous test for food safety before the product reaches the restaurant or grocery shelf.

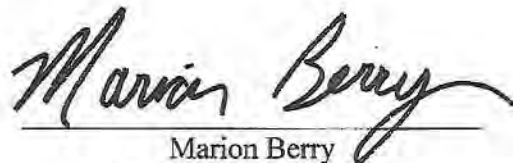
We understand that USDA rulemaking process regarding this issue has begun and request that your office keep us advised as to the schedules for drafting USDA's recommendations, the dates for public commentary and public hearings, and the timeline for promulgating the final regulation.

Thank you in advance for your assistance. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,



Mike Ross




Marion Berry



John Boozman



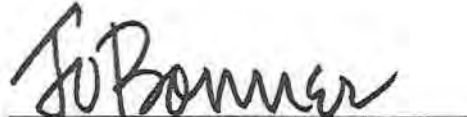
Travis Childers


Rodney Alexander

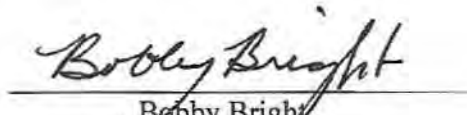

Charlie Melancon


Artur Davis


Parker Griffith


Jo Bonner


Robert Aderholt


Bobby Bright


Mike Rogers (AL)

BENNIE G. THOMPSON
SECOND DISTRICT, MISSISSIPPI

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Congress of the United States House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-2402

October 22, 2009

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
Room 200-A
Jamie L. Whitten Federal Building
12th & Jefferson Drive, SW 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

As you continue to implement the 2008 Farm Bill, I urge you to support a broad definition of catfish that will insure that catfish products meet the standards for safety that Americans have come to expect from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

The legislative language in the 2008 Farm Bill leaves no ambiguity in its intent that all catfish, domestic and imported, meet the highest USDA standards -- at least equal to the guarantees already accorded to beef and poultry. Like you, I feel strongly about ensuring the health and safety of American consumers.

I fully support the farm bill's intent for a broader definition regarding catfish products that ensures safer fish and more accurate labeling. The American consumer should know that U.S. and imported catfish products have met the most rigorous test for food safety before the product reaches the restaurant or grocery shelf.

Mississippi represents 78% of the catfish production in the United States. Unfortunately, our acreage and production numbers are down and so are the jobs associated with production. In previous years we had nearly 95,000 acres in catfish production. Today, we have 70,000 active acres and the feed mills associated are running at 80% capacity compared to last year. In previous years, Mississippi had over 16,000 people working in the catfish industry and that number is currently less than 10,000 employees. Even though our industry is facing challenges, they remain extremely committed to providing a safe product for the American consumer.

I understand that USDA rulemaking process regarding this issue has begun and request that your office keep us advised as to the schedules for drafting USDA's recommendations, the dates for public commentary and public hearings, and the timeline for promulgating the final regulation.

Thank you in advance for your assistance. I look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,



Bennie G. Thompson
Member of Congress

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|--|---|--|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 107 WEST MADISON STREET
P.O. Box 610
BOLTON, MS 39041
(601) 866-9003
(601) 866-9036 FAX
(800) 355-9003. In St. | <input type="checkbox"/> 509 HIGHWAY 82 WEST
GREENWOOD, MS 38930
(662) 455-9003
(662) 453-0118 FAX | <input type="checkbox"/> 910 COURTHOUSE LANE
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(662) 334-1304 FAX | <input type="checkbox"/> 3507 MEGGAR EVERS BOULEVARD
JACKSON, MS 39213
(601) 946-9003
(601) 982-5337 FAX | <input type="checkbox"/> 263 EAST MAIN STREET
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MARKS, MS 38646
(662) 326-9003
(662) 328-9003 FAX | <input type="checkbox"/> MOUND BAYOU CITY HALL
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106 GREEN AVENUE, SUITE 106
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