

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