

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

February 21, 2008

The Honorable Mike Johanns
Secretary of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Johanns:

We are writing to bring your attention to an urgent matter that highlights the need for oversight and regulation of food safety at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). As the principal agency responsible for promoting a safe food supply, we urge your support for implementing humane handling methods standards for food purchased by the federal government.

In late January, an undercover investigation by The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) revealed widespread mistreatment of "downed" cattle – animals too sick or injured to walk to slaughter – at a Southern California slaughter plant. Under State law and regulations promulgated by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), these animals must be given veterinary treatment or humanely euthanized. Instead, a video released by the HSUS shows workers at a meat packing plant in California kicking cows, ramming them with the blades of a forklift, jabbing them in the eyes, applying painful electrical shocks and even torturing them with a hose and water in attempts to force sick or injured animals to walk to slaughter.

Perhaps most alarming is that the slaughterhouse supplies beef to the second largest supplier of meat to the United States Department of Agriculture's School Lunch Program, which was named the 2004-2005 "Supplier of the Year," by the USDA and delivered beef to school children in more than 36 states. This company also supplied several other federal government food aid programs.

The deplorable situation at this slaughterhouse highlights the urgent need for our legislation and increased safety and humane standards at the USDA. House Resolution 1726, the Farm Animal Stewardship Purchasing Act, would require producers who supply meat, dairy, and egg products to the

federal government to meet a set of basic humane standards for raising farm animals. The legislation would also require the government to provide adequate veterinary care, including prompt treatment of injuries or euthanasia for a sick or injured animal. We recommend the USDA consider adopting provisions of this legislation into its current regulatory activities.

Had the Farm Animal Stewardship Act been law, it would have not only prevented the inhumane handling of animals, but also would have precluded the health hazard in federal food programs now occurring across the country.

Given the revelations of abuse and illegal activity, we believe it is imperative that the USDA implement humane handling methods at meat packing facilities through regulation or Executive Order. The safety of our food, particularly in schools, demands our highest attention.

Sincerely,



Christopher Shays
Member of Congress



Peter DeFazio
Member of Congress