

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 7, 2008

Honorable Colin C. Peterson, Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Bob Goodlatte, Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Request for Hearing on H.R. 661, Downed Animal and Food Safety Protection Act, and
H.R. 1726, Farm Animal Stewardship Purchasing Act

Dear Chairman Peterson and Ranking Member Goodlatte:

As you move forward in outlining your agenda for the Second Session of the 110th Congress, we would like to bring your attention to an urgent matter that highlights the need for our legislation, and we ask that the Committee hold a hearing on our bills.

Just last week, 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.

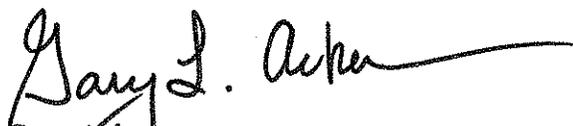
The deplorable situation at the slaughterhouse highlights the urgent need for our two pieces of legislation. Representative Ackerman’s H.R. 661, the Downed Animal and Food Safety Protection Act, would require slaughterhouses to humanely euthanize all nonambulatory or “downer” livestock. Representative DeFazio’s H.R. 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.

Combined, these two pieces of legislation may have prevented the inhumane handling of animals at Westland, and definitely 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 House Agriculture Committee hold a hearing on H.R. 661 and H.R. 1726, and, more generally, humane handling methods at meat packing facilities. We would welcome additional thoughts from Committee Members regarding the agenda for this hearing.

We look forward to working with you and your staff to develop this hearing in the very near future.

Sincerely,



Gary Ackerman
Member of Congress



Steven LaTourette
Member of Congress



Peter DeFazio
Member of Congress



Christopher Shays
Member of Congress