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February 25, 2013

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

This letter is in response to recent comments made by the Department of Agriculture (USDA) regarding the manner in which the administration intends to implement sequestration as it relates to federal meat inspection activities. USDA maintains that sequestration would result in an across-the-board furlough of as much as 15 days for all Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) employees, including inspectors. Since a federal inspector must be present during processing of meat, poultry, and egg products, the decision to implement furloughs without the use of available flexibility will shutter 6,290 facilities nationwide, resulting in more than \$400 million in lost wages for the over 500,000 individuals who work in these facilities, including over 43,000 workers in Missouri. Taking into account over one million livestock and poultry producers who rely on these plants operating as planned, the economic impact on the private sector would be unduly devastating.

In accordance with Section 256(k)(2) of the Balance Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985 (P.L. 99-177), a sequestration order would apply by program, project, or activity at USDA. Beyond this level, an agency has flexibility to implement reductions in order to spare essential activities. In addition, a sequestration order should not affect the Department's ability to use available transfer and reprogramming authority. Given that almost one-quarter of FSIS' budget is allocated to the Washington, DC, area and fifty-two percent accounts for personnel compensation for all field staff, I believe the agency has sufficient ability and authority to configure reductions and furloughs in a way that minimizes the economic impact to private sector employment and American consumers. Should a sequestration order ultimately be issued, I urge the Department to use those existing authorities and continue meeting its inspection obligations without interruption.

Sincerely,



Roy Blunt
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug Administration, &
Related Agencies