



February 11, 2013

Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Secretary of Agriculture  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, DC 20250-3700

Dear Mr. Secretary:

The American Meat Institute (AMI) is aware of comments made by you and the United States Department of Agriculture (Department) regarding the impact that sequestration, should it go into effect, could have on the federally inspected meat and poultry industry. We agree with the assessment that furloughing inspectors would have a profound, indeed devastating, effect on meat and poultry companies, their employees, and consumers, not to mention the producers who raise the cattle, hogs, lamb, and poultry processed in those facilities.

AMI respectfully disagrees with the Department's assertion that, in the event of sequestration, the furloughs referenced are necessary and legal. The Federal Meat Inspection Act and the Poultry Products Inspection Act (the Acts) impose many obligations on the inspected industry, which we strive to meet. Those Acts, also however, impose an obligation on the Department – to provide inspection services.

Although a significant percentage of the Food Safety and Inspection Service's (FSIS) budget goes to personnel salaries, not all of those funds are used to pay the inspectors necessary to allow establishments to operate. Rather than impose across the board furloughs that will lead to plant closures, it is incumbent upon the Department to examine the options available to it, e.g., suspending certain non-essential programs and furloughing non-essential personnel within the 13 different offices (only one of which involves inspectors in plant) that make up FSIS. Such an approach would enable FSIS to meet its obligations under a sequestration scenario and satisfy its statutory obligation to provide inspection pursuant to the Acts. By doing so the Department would avoid inflicting unnecessary hardship on the more than 500,000 people who work in the meat and poultry industry and the more than one million livestock and poultry producers whose livelihoods also depend on those plants operating, and would also prevent disruption of supplies to the 95 percent of Americans who make meat and poultry a nutritious part of their diets.

I would be pleased to meet you to discuss in more detail our concerns in this matter.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Patrick Boyle", written in a cursive style.

J. Patrick Boyle  
President and Chief Executive Officer

cc: Dr. Elisabeth Hagen  
Al Almanza