



Lincoln & Chambliss call on Obama to challenge Russia's import restrictions on U.S. meat

By Stewart Doan

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Washington, Jan. 15 – In a joint letter to President Obama Thursday, Senate Agriculture Committee Chair Blanche Lincoln (D-AR) and Ranking Member Saxby Chambliss (R-GA) warn that Russia's "Recent decisions to restrict imports of U.S. agricultural products are adversely impacting domestic producers." They call on the President to address this challenge "especially with respect to U.S. exports of pork, poultry, and beef."

Once again demonstrating their close working relationship in dealing with agricultural issues, Lincoln and Chambliss point out that "In 2008, the last year for which we have full data, U.S. exports of pork, poultry, and beef to Russia were valued at more than \$1.3 billion, ranking as our fourth largest market for the combined set of products. Extended absence from this important market would be costly to our livestock and poultry producers, who already face a difficult financial situation due to the current economic recession."

The complete text of the senators' January 14 letter follows:

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing to express our strong concern about recent actions taken by the Russian government with respect to new agricultural trade barriers. Recent decisions to restrict imports of U.S. agricultural products are adversely impacting domestic producers. As a U.S. delegation prepares to embark for meetings with the Russian Ministries of Health and Agriculture, we urge you to fully engage all Administration resources to address these agricultural trade issues, especially with respect to U.S. exports of pork, poultry, and beef.

While the actions against our exports have taken different forms, they all erect non-scientific barriers to trade. First, if left unchallenged they would have the effect of keeping U.S. products almost entirely out of Russian markets. Second while the Russian government's varied justifications centered on sanitary measures, analyses or guidelines of international agencies such as the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) or the Codex Alimentarius do not support Russia's conclusions. As such, attempts to manage the flow of imports raises questions regarding Russia's willingness and readiness to become a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

With respect to pork, a variety of Russian ministries have raised a series of questionable or undocumented objections about processing or residue issues for products originating from specific U.S. plants, leading to those facilities being de-listed for eligibility to export to Russia. With the delisting of nearly 30 pork processing plants, 98 percent of pork processed in the United States is ineligible for export.

With respect to poultry, as of January 1, 2010, the government of Russia has determined that it will no longer accept for import poultry that was processed with the use of chlorine rinses, even though numerous studies and most recognized scientific bodies worldwide have found this practice to be entirely safe. It is also our understanding that a significant number of poultry processors in Russia use the same technique. Since almost all U.S. poultry plants use chlorine rinses, this action has essentially closed their market to our product.

Finally, we have been told that the U.S. beef industry has been informed that only U.S. product which has been inspected according to Russian standards will be allowed into the country as of February 1, 2010. If the information is correct it will also significantly impact U.S. beef exports.

In 2008, the last year for which we have full data, U.S. exports of pork, poultry, and beef to Russia were valued at more than \$1.3 billion, ranking as our fourth largest market for the combined set of products. Extended absence from this important market would be costly to our livestock and poultry producers, who already face a difficult financial situation due to the current economic recession.

We are confident the U.S. delegation traveling to Moscow will carry a strong message on behalf of the U.S. government and American producers. It is important to find a mutually agreeable solution that will be based on sound science and ensures open and predictable access for U.S. exports to the Russian market. Pending a positive outcome, the confidence gained in those discussions can translate to other areas of mutual interest.

Thank you for your immediate attention and we look forward to working with you on this and other matters of importance to U.S. agriculture.

Very truly yours,
Senator Blanche Lincoln, Chairman
Senator Saxby Chambliss, Ranking Republican Member

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