

United States Senate

January 8, 2014

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Senate Agriculture Committee
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Member
Senate Agriculture Committee
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Cochran:

I'm writing to respectfully request that you allow Farm Bill conferees the opportunity to vote concerning the repeal of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Catfish Inspection Program.

As you know, the House-version of the Farm Bill includes a provision to repeal the catfish program (Section 11107 of H.R. 2642). During Senate consideration of the Farm Bill, I offered an identical amendment but was denied a vote even though the Senate approved a similar amendment by voice-vote just a year earlier in 2012.

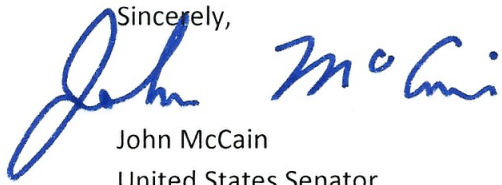
There is broad bipartisan support in both the House and Senate for repealing the catfish program. Multiple audits by the Government Accountability Offices (GAO) revealed that the cattish program will waste millions of taxpayer dollars and duplicate seafood inspections performed by the Food and Drug Admiration. The President's Budget for Fiscal Year 2014 proposed to eliminate the catfish program because there is no genuine, scientifically-based food safety reason for its existence. In actuality, the true purpose of the catfish program is to artificially support domestic catfish farmers by erecting regulatory hurdles against foreign catfish importers at the expense of the American taxpayer.

If we do not repeal the USDA Catfish Inspection Program, hardworking farmers and ranchers across the United States may find themselves reeling from the effects of a multi-billion dollar trade war. An article published by *The New York Times*, "Catfish Inspections Pose Problems for a Trade Pact," (November 14, 2013) warned that Vietnam, a key trading partner and producer of catfish, has threatened retaliatory trade actions against the United States if the program is not halted. There are over 20 American farm groups that oppose the USDA catfish inspection program out of concern for the harmful effects of such actions would have on American agricultural exports.

The need to repeal the catfish program far outweighs whatever parochial reasons exist to prop-up a small number of domestic catfish farmers. If Farm Bill conferees are denied the opportunity to vote against this reckless and wasteful catfish program, please be assured that I will work with my colleagues in the House and Senate to legislatively terminate it at every opportunity.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John McCain". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "M".

John McCain
United States Senator