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August 7, 2014

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
US Department of Agriculture
14th and Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We write to you today to request that you immediately restore Federal grain inspection services at the Port of Vancouver in Washington State.

In a recent letter to industry stakeholders, Under Secretary for Agriculture, Edward Avalos claimed unspecified security concerns as a basis for withholding statutorily mandated inspection services from the grain export facility at the port.

In a recent press story, you are quoted as stating "it is incumbent on me to make sure that any decisions are made with safety in mind." Were there to be documented concerns for the safety of Federal employees in this facility, we would stand behind the decision to withhold inspection. Indeed, in briefings of our staff, Mr. Larry Mitchell, Administrator of the Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration claimed security concerns but when asked, was unable to provide any specifics. Our staff has requested a copy of the report submitted to Mr. Mitchell weeks ago by your security assessment team which had been sent to the facility last October as well as in July of this year. Short of receiving a copy of the security report, we have requested a briefing by the security team to better understand the concerns presumably preventing assignment of federal inspectors to the facility. Both requests have been repeatedly denied.

Our staff has since spoken directly with the USDA officials who conducted the security assessment of the port facility. Those officials have confirmed that there are no security concerns that would prevent USDA grain inspectors from entering or exiting the facility through the vehicular gate, or by helicopter. The official did recommend that the vehicle transporting the USDA inspectors be placarded identifying it as a USDA vehicle, a measure that is seemingly easy to resolve.

As someone who has spent considerable time and energy fighting to open international markets for our agricultural products, we know you are concerned about the potential loss of those markets due to the closure of this important export terminal. We ask once again that you immediately restore inspection services so that grain exports can resume.

Best regards,

Handwritten signature of Frank D. Lucas in cursive script.

Frank Lucas, Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture

Handwritten signature of K. Michael Conaway in cursive script.

K. Michael Conaway, Chairman
Subcommittee on General Farm
Commodities and Risk Management