

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

June 24, 2016

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

We write today to ask for an update of what steps the Department is taking to ensure its pathogen testing protocols adequately protect public health. We are concerned that recent scientific findings suggest some processing techniques may interfere with or invalidate pathogen testing results.

A recent article published by the Agricultural Research Service entitled, "Effect of Simulated Sanitizer Carryover on Recovery of *Salmonella* from Broiler Carcass Rinsates," suggests the agency's testing procedures for *Salmonella* may be affected by the use of chemicals by processing plants. The article found that three antimicrobial sanitizers commonly used to reduce pathogens on poultry carcasses may cause false-negative results. According to the article, one of the compounds continued to skew test results even after it was allowed to drain for a full five minutes before testing. Given the diversity of processing plants and pathogen testing locations, this research suggests the Department's *Salmonella* testing results may be underestimating the presence of this pathogen.

Testing for *Salmonella* plays a critical role in the Department's inspection program, the new poultry pathogen standards for which we advocated, and the Department's *Salmonella* Action Plan. Therefore it is our view the Department must work to ensure that the use of chemical sprays and dips do not create false negative test results in order to protect the safety of the food supply and the public's health.

Given these issues, we would ask the Department to respond to the following questions:

- 1) What actions does the Department plan to take in response to the recent findings by the Agricultural Research Service? How does the Department plan to ensure that its pathogen testing procedures ensure that results are accurate and consistent across all processing plants?
- 2) How many poultry processing facilities currently use one of the three chemicals identified in the article as potentially causing false negatives?

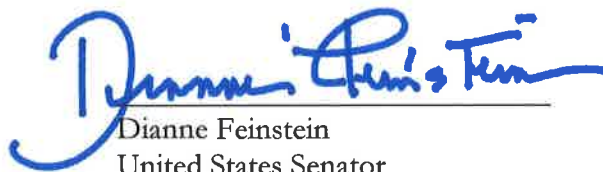
- 3) It is our understanding that Agricultural Research Services will begin using a new testing solution that the agency believes will prevent false negative readings. How effective is this new solution in preventing false negatives under the ARS study conditions?
- 4) How will the Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) verify that the new buffering solution adequately addresses the potential for false negative results?

Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



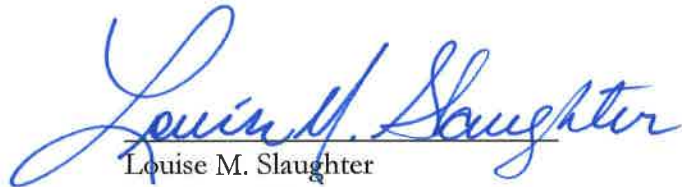
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