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POLICY

SMALL BUSINESS

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515–1505

March 28, 2012

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Stop 010
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

As you know, the public is currently dealing with a great deal of confusion regarding high quality lean textured beef that's produced by companies like Beef Products Incorporated (BPI). Given the tremendous amount of misinformation that was released to the public about lean finely textured beef, it is no surprise that many consumers have begun to question the quality of this product.

In an effort to address some of the concerns that had been raised with the use of lean finely textured beef in the National School Lunch Program, the USDA announced on March 15, 2012, that schools would have the option to remove the meat product from their school lunches. While we believe it is always appropriate for the USDA to give schools choices in how they meet the requirements of the National School Lunch program, we are concerned that schools, retailers and consumers are still left with the impression that lean finely textured beef is something other than a safe and healthy source of protein, which greatly concerns us.

The USDA plays a unique role in ensuring the safety of our nation's food supply. As such, it must be the arbiter for facts and science in cases such as this. However, we are concerned that the USDA has not done enough to educate the public about lean finely textured beef and promote its use as a safe and healthy food choice.

As you know, lean finely textured beef has been added to ground beef for many years to make the product more lean. Before the LFTB is added to ground beef, it is treated with ammonium hydroxide to kill bacteria, especially E-Coli. In a 2008 Washington Post article, Engineering a Safer Burger, the paper called Beef Products Incorporated (BPI), the nation's largest supplier of LFTB, "a fortress against potentially lethal bacteria." BPI makes lean, high quality 100% beef that meets the highest levels of safety. It is for this very reason that the USDA has included lean finely textured beef in the National School Lunch Program.

We are writing you today to ask that the USDA take steps to educate the public about the safety and benefits of lean finely textured beef and to encourage schools to make their food choices based on nutrition and food safety, not public perception. American consumers deserve sound

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science and access to the facts when deciding how to budget their grocery list, particularly when costs to family budgets remain unwavering. We ask that you engage the full force of the USDA to ensure that consumer choice is driven by facts, and not misinformation in public media.

Sincerely,

Steve King
Member of Congress

Tom Latham
Member of Congress

Leonard Boswell
Member of Congress