March 2, 2012

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
328-A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow:

On February 13, 2012, the Administration released its Fiscal Year 2013 USDA budget proposal. As in previous years, the budget submission requests so-called "user fees" for government mandated food safety inspection programs for meat, poultry and egg products. These proposed fees represent a food safety tax on consumers and not just a fee on processors. We urge you to reject the Administration's request for these new food safety taxes.

The USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) budget summary includes the Administration's intent to submit legislation which will establish these new user fees or taxes. The two new taxes outlined below are the cause of concern:

- A user fee collected from plants for additional inspections and related activities made necessary due to the failure in performance by the covered establishment
- A food safety services user fee that would recover a part of the cost of providing FSIS related services at covered establishments and plants, as determined by the Secretary and which would be based on the facility size.

Meat, poultry and egg product inspection is a public health and safety program required by federal law and has been funded through tax dollars for over a century. Food safety inspection benefits everyone and therefore should be paid for through appropriated funds, which previous Congresses have agreed with.

The proposed tax will make the current equitable funding mechanism inherently regressive, since low and middle-income families spend a higher portion of their income on food than do wealthier Americans. Furthermore, this proposal to transform food safety inspection provides less accountability for the government to manage program costs, results and efficiencies.

We urge Congress to continue to oppose proposals to assess new user fees, either in whole or in part, to fund federally mandated meat, poultry or egg product inspection. In this fragile economy, a new food safety tax could put jobs at risk and raise prices for consumers.

If you have questions, please contact any of the signatory organizations.

Sincerely,

Alabama Poultry & Egg Association
American Association of Meat Processors
American Farm Bureau Federation
American Frozen Food Institute
American Meat Institute

American Sheep Industry Association
Broiler and Egg Association of Minnesota (BEAM)
California Poultry Federation
Delmarva Poultry Industry, Inc.
Eastern Meat Packers Association
Georgia Poultry Federation
Illinois Association of Meat Processors
Indiana State Poultry Association
International Association of Refrigerated Warehouses (IARW)
Iowa Meat Processors Association
Kansas Meat Processors Association
Kentucky Poultry Federation
Michigan Agri-Business Association
Michigan Allied Poultry Industries
Michigan Meat Association
Mid-States Meat Association
Midwest Food Processors Association
Minnesota Association of Meat Processors
Minnesota Turkey Growers Association (MTGA)
Mississippi Poultry Association
Missouri Association of Meat Processors
National Cattlemen's Beef Association
National Chicken Council
National Farmers Union
National Frozen Pizza Institute
National Meat Association
National Pork Producers Council
National Turkey Federation
North American Meat Processors Association
North Carolina Poultry Federation
Ohio Association of Meat Processors
Ohio Poultry Association
Oklahoma-Texas Meat Processors Association
The Poultry Federation (Arkansas, Missouri and Oklahoma)
Shelf-Stable Food Processors Association
Snack Food Association
Southeastern Meat Association
Southwest Meat Association
United Egg Association
U.S. Poultry & Egg Association
Texas Association of Meat Processors
Texas Poultry Federation
Virginia Poultry Federation