

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 3, 2011

The Honorable Herb Kohl
Chairman
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Agriculture, Rural Development,
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Agriculture, Rural Development,
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Kohl and Ranking Member Blunt:

Earlier this year, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) published a proposed rule to alter the nutritional standards in the School Lunch and School Breakfast programs. This rule would limit the servings of certain vegetables, including white potatoes, corn, lima beans, and green peas, to one cup per week in the National School Lunch Program and prohibit serving these vegetables in the National School Breakfast Program altogether.

We support the Department's goal to increase the availability of all fruits, vegetables, and whole grains in the school meal programs and to ensure the foods served in the meal programs are delivered in a fashion that meet the nutritional needs of children within their recommended caloric intake levels. However, we are concerned that the January 2011 proposed rule may unnecessarily limit nutritious and more affordable vegetables that are easily accessible to school districts and popular with school-age children.

We recognize the need to improve the nutritional standards in the school meals programs and also recognize that enhancing access to all fruits and vegetables may entail some cost; however, we remain concerned that unnecessary limitations on healthy and affordable vegetables can lead to a needless escalation in costs of the school meals programs. The Department's proposed rule would unnecessarily impose additional and unanticipated costs of up to \$7 billion over five years. The lion's share of these costs would be incurred by state governments and local school districts.

The vegetables the Department proposes to limit contain significant quantities of many of the vitamins and minerals that are recommended for school-age children, including dietary fiber, vitamins C and A, iron, and a whole host of other crucial nutrients. We believe that allowing schools the flexibility to make reasonable and suitable substitutions among affordable fresh and nutritious food options is a sensible way to keep costs at a reasonable level and ensure schools can provide consistent access to critical nutrients for children.

Additionally, we are concerned that if implemented, the proposed rule could seriously and needlessly injure potato, corn, lima bean, and pea growers around the country. Not only

could they suffer an immediate loss in sales, but also the Department's designation has the potential to unfairly stigmatize these vegetables as "unhealthy" in the eyes of many, which, in turn, could depress consumer demand and lead to financial losses for producers in many rural communities.

As such, we respectfully request that the Committee include the following language in its FY 2012 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies spending bill:

None of the funds provided by this Act shall be available to implement new nutritional standards in the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs that would unnecessarily discriminate against certain vegetables, including white potatoes, corn, lima beans, and green peas.

We appreciate your consideration of this request and look forward to working with you as the Committee develops its FY 2012 spending bills.

Sincerely,

Susan Collins

Mark Udall

John Hoven

Kelly A. Ayotte

Olympic Snowy

Jim Risch

Mike Crayon

Ron Wyden
