United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 4, 2011

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

The Honorable Ron Kirk
United States Trade Representative
Executive Office of the President
600 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20508

Dear Secretary Vilsack and Ambassador Kirk:

We write to follow up on the commitment made by the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) during the Senate Finance Committee mock markup of the South Korea-U.S. trade agreement (KORUS) on July 7. At the markup, Ambassador Demetrios Marantis pledged to meet with China and Japan regarding their barriers to U.S. beef imports within 120 days. We welcome this commitment and urge USTR and USDA to work closely together to address these barriers as soon as possible.

We believe continuous high-level engagement by USTR and USDA is critical to making progress towards ending China and Japan's unscientific restrictions to U.S. beef products. In the case of South Korea, the aggressive and sustained engagement by the Administration and Congress was vital to reopening this market to U.S. beef under thirty months of age in 2008. We appreciate your commitment to work with Korea on a plan for full market access. To maintain and expand the global market for U.S. beef, there must now be stronger, sustained outreach to China, Japan, and other countries that continue to limit access to our beef.

In response to an occurrence of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) in 2003, the United States adopted even more rigorous BSE safeguard procedures. These extraordinary precautions led the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) to find that U.S. beef of all ages is safe. Despite this finding, Japan still maintains an unscientific ban on U.S. beef over 20 months of age. As a result, U.S. beef exports to Japan remain nearly $1 billion below their pre-2003 levels. Similarly, China has been the fastest growing market for U.S. exports overall during the last decade but remains the only major market completely closed to U.S. beef due to BSE.

We commend the Administration's engagement earlier this year with China on greater market access for U.S. beef. There now needs to be immediate follow up to these discussions in order to demonstrate the U.S. commitment to eliminate unscientific trade barriers to U.S. beef exports. We look forward to hearing from you on this very important issue.

Sincerely,

Debbie Stabenow

Pat Roberts

Jeff Bingaman

Max Baucus

Bill Nelson

Chuck Grassley

Patty Murray

Mike Johanns

Jim E Risch

Jerry Moran

Carl Levin

Mike Crapo

John Barrasso

Amy Klobuchar

John Boozman

Mark Udall

Henry Cornyn

Claire McCaskill

Ed Benjamin Nelson

Jon Tester

Maria Cantwell

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John Thune

John Hoeven

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James M. Inhofe

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Roy Blunt

Richard G. Lugar

Jim Johnson

Sherrod Brown

Tom Harkin

Rob Portman

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[illegible]

John Conyers

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