



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Food Safety
and Inspection
Service

Washington, D.C.
20250

DEC 14 2011

Brandon Guillen
Fifth Grade



Dear Brandon:

Thank you for your letters of November 15, 2011, to Agriculture Secretary Thomas Vilsack, Administrator Alfred Almanza of the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), and Administrator Gregory Parham of the Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. In your letters you wrote of your support for language in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2012 Agriculture Appropriations Bill that would prevent tax dollars from being used to inspect horse slaughter facilities, and encouraged the Secretary and Administrators to keep this language. I am pleased to address your concerns.

FSIS is the public health regulatory agency in USDA responsible for ensuring that meat, poultry, and processed egg products are safe, wholesome, and accurately labeled. FSIS enforces the Federal Meat Inspection Act, the Poultry Products Inspection Act, and the Egg Products Inspection Act, which require Federal inspection and regulation of meat, poultry, and processed egg products prepared for distribution in commerce as human food.

FSIS also is responsible for enforcing the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act, which requires that all livestock at federally inspected establishments be handled and slaughtered in a humane way. Humane methods of handling and slaughtering livestock prevent needless suffering of animals and result in safer and better working conditions for employees in slaughter establishments. Livestock includes cattle, sheep, swine, and goats, horses, mules, and other equines.

FSIS inspection activities can occur only if they are funded by Congress. Congress is the legislative branch of the government. It writes laws and determines how government funds (money) should be spent. As a result, only Congress can add or remove the language concerning the use of tax dollars for horse inspection. FSIS is in the executive branch of the government. It carries out and enforces the laws that Congress writes.

Since 2006, Congress has passed bills that have prohibited the use of Government funds for inspection of horses for human food. However, on November 18, Congress passed the FY 2012 Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act (H.R. 2112). This law does not contain

Brandon Guillen

Page 2

any language that would prevent funding for the inspection of horses for human consumption. If there are meat producers who wish to slaughter and process horse meat, the FSIS inspectors would be required to perform inspections at their facilities. Interest in horse slaughter has increased since 2006, particularly in the western states, where there are reports that the number of abandoned and wild horses has been rising.

As a citizen and future taxpayer, your thoughts on how American tax dollars should be spent are very important, especially to your elected representatives. You can find out who your Senators and Representatives are at <http://www.usa.gov/Contact/Elected.shtml>. If you are unsure of your congressional district, you can find it by using your home zip code at <https://writerep.house.gov/writerep/welcome.shtml>.

Thank you for your concern and for writing.

Sincerely,



Carol L. Blake
Assistant Administrator
Office of Public Affairs and Consumer Education