



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

JUN 14 2013

The Honorable Patrick Meehan
U.S. House of Representatives
204 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515-3807

Dear Congressman Meehan:

Thank you for your letter of March 27, 2013, cosigned by your colleagues, regarding the status of equine slaughter inspection. I am pleased to address your concerns, and I apologize for the delayed response.

I appreciate your passion for the humane treatment of animals and your position on this issue. The President's Fiscal Year 2014 budget proposal includes language reinstating the ban on the ante-mortem inspection of horses at slaughter.

The Department of Agriculture (USDA) is required by statute to protect the public health by providing inspection services for amenable species of animals. Horses, mules, and other equines are amenable under the Federal Meat Inspection Act (FMIA). Thus, to meet this statutory requirement, USDA is preparing to resume inspection of the slaughter and processing of these animals intended for human consumption.

USDA will ensure that there is compliance with all relevant statutes and regulations, including the FMIA (21 U.S.C. 601 et seq.), the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act (7 U.S.C. 1901 et seq.) and its implementing regulations (9 CFR 313), the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point regulations (9 CFR Part 417), and the Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures (9 CFR Part 416) regulations.

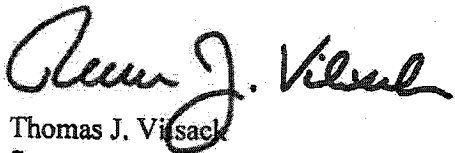
In 2006, Congress prohibited USDA's use of appropriations for ante-mortem inspection of equines (Section 794 of Pub. L. 109-97), effectively halting equine slaughter in the United States; however, Congress lifted that prohibition in 2011 (Pub. L. 112-55). USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) is proceeding within its statutory and regulatory obligations to prepare to resume equine slaughter inspection. FSIS is reviewing the petition from the Humane Society of the United States and Front Range Rescue in light of applicable law, science, and—especially—public health considerations. We expect to respond to the petition in the very near future.

The Honorable Patrick Meehan
Page 2

I appreciate your concern about food safety. FSIS and I share your concern. If we find, however, that there is no basis for a food safety concern, given the law, we will have no choice but to issue a grant of inspection to the establishments that seek one, which will allow them to operate.

Thank you again for your letter. If you have further questions, or if we can be of additional assistance, please have a member of your staff contact Brian Baenig, Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations, at (202) 720-7095. A similar letter is being sent to your colleagues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tom J. Vilsack".

Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary