

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Saturday, June 04, 2016 10:26 PM
To: AGSEC - OES
Subject: Please Make Animal Welfare Label Claims Meaningful

Dear Secretary Thomas Vilsack:

Animal welfare is important to me. According to numerous polls, it is also important to a majority of consumers who purchase meat and poultry products. Unfortunately, consumers cannot rely on claims like "free range," "humanely raised," and "sustainably farmed" because the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service fails to adequately assess these claims.

Consumer protection and animal welfare groups have even deemed these claims worthless. For example, Consumer Report's "Label Report Card" assesses the free range claim as "not meaningful" because it is inconsistently applied and not verified. BuyingPoultry.com assigns a "D" rating to the free range claim and an "F" to the humanely raised claim.

The Animal Welfare Institute investigated the FSIS' label approval process for more than 100 approved labels containing animal welfare claims. AWI found that--

? The FSIS is approving animal production claims, such as "humanely raised," and "sustainably farmed," in the absence of any definition or production standards.

? For other claims, such as "free range" and "range grown," the FSIS is applying an overly permissive definition that is allowing consumers to be misled about the quality of the products they are purchasing.

? The FSIS is approving some label applications despite little or no evidence for the particular animal production claims.

? The FSIS is approving other label applications for animal production claims when conflicting evidence has been provided.

I was disappointed to see these findings and hope that the USDA will work to strengthen its label approval process. It can do this by granting AWI's petitions to (1) require third-party certification of animal welfare and environmental stewardship label claims (2014) and (2) redefine the free range claim and amend the USDA's approval process (2016). In addition, I urge you to request that the USDA Office of Inspector General audit the FSIS' approval of animal production claims. Thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely,

Peter Cutting
[REDACTED]