



March 4, 2009

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama:

On behalf of the California Agricultural Commissioners and Sealers Association (CA-CASA), this is to acknowledge and thank you for recognizing in your FY 2010 budget the need to ensure that the Nation's supplies of meat and poultry products are accurately labeled and packaged.

As you know, on October 9, 2008, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) implemented a Final Rule eliminating wet tare provisions for determining net weight of packaged poultry and meat products from FSIS' incorporation of National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) Handbook 133. The result of this action is a mandate to employ dry tare methodology, which credits to net weight the weight of salt water and other solutions often added to meat and poultry by packers and which we contend renders consumers unable to compare value among such products.

The process used in excluding Handbook 133 wet tare provisions from FSIS' regulations was not transparent and significantly impacted California consumers. In fact, the proposed rule dated March 2006 specifically stated that FSIS was incorporating the 2005 version of Handbook 133 into its meat and poultry inspection regulations (9 CFR parts 317.18 through 317.22 and 381.121a through 381.121e, respectively) and the resulting regulations "remain substantively unchanged from those currently incorporated by reference in FSIS' regulations," a statement we contend is inaccurate.

Our mission as Sealers is to ensure that consumers have adequate and accurate information from package labeling to facilitate meaningful and reliable value comparison. In 2006, Weights and Measures officials conducted a study that indicates the loss in value to consumers due to the inability to use the wet tare procedures is estimated at \$246 million in California alone. Assuming that California has an approximate 12% market share this projects to over \$2 billion annually to consumers nationwide.

At a time of great economic uncertainty for many U.S. households, we again commend you for recognizing the need to address this important matter. We look forward to developing a full-fledged partnership with you and your administration to move our country forward on issues impacting agriculture, the environment, food safety and proper consumer labeling.

Sincerely,

Michael Boitano
President

cc: The Honorable Tom Vilsack, Secretary of Agriculture
California congressional delegation

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