

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 19, 2008

Chairman Rosa DeLauro  
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural  
Development, FDA, & Related Agencies  
2362-A Rayburn Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Ranking Member Jack Kingston  
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural  
Development, FDA, & Related Agencies  
1016 Longworth Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman DeLauro and Ranking Member Kingston:

We are writing to thank you for your outstanding support during recent years for improved enforcement by the U.S. Department of Agriculture of key animal welfare laws and to urge you to sustain this effort in Fiscal Year 2009. Your leadership is making a great difference in helping to protect the welfare of millions of animals across the country. As you know, better enforcement will also benefit people by helping to prevent: 1) food safety risks to consumers from sick animals who can transmit illness, and injuries to slaughterhouse workers from suffering animals; 2) orchestrated dogfights and cockfights that often involve illegal gambling, drug trafficking, and human violence, and can contribute to the spread of costly illnesses such as bird flu; 3) the sale of unhealthy pets by commercial breeders, commonly referred to as "puppy mills"; 4) laboratory conditions that may impair the scientific integrity of animal based research; 5) risks of disease transmission from, and dangerous encounters with, wild animals in or during public exhibition; and 6) injuries and deaths of pets on commercial airline flights due to mishandling and exposure to adverse environmental conditions. In order to continue the important work made possible by the Committee's prior support, we request the following for FY 2009:

## **Food Safety and Inspection Service / Humane Methods of Slaughter Act (HMSA) Enforcement**

**We request funding and language to ensure strengthened HMSA enforcement.** We were shocked by the recent undercover investigation that revealed egregious abuse of "downer" cows too sick and injured to stand and walk on their own – by a company that was the #2 beef supplier to the National School Lunch Program and had been honored by USDA as "Supplier of the Year" for the 2004-2005 academic year. Unfortunately, the blatant and recurrent violations of food safety and humane rules documented in a 6-week hidden camera investigation were not reported by 5 USDA inspection personnel at the plant. This situation has focused national attention on the urgent need for more effective USDA oversight of humane handling and food safety rules. We urge the Committee to make this a high priority in order to better protect consumers and animals.

## **APHIS / Animal Welfare Act (AWA) Enforcement**

**We request that you support the President's request of \$21,522,000 for AWA enforcement under the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS).** We commend the Committee for responding in recent years to the urgent need for increased funding for the Animal Care division to improve its inspections of more than 14,000 sites, including commercial breeding facilities, laboratories, zoos, circuses, and airlines, to ensure compliance with AWA standards. Animal Care now has 105 inspectors (with 6 positions in the process of being filled), compared to 64 inspectors at the end of the 1990s. We are pleased that the President's FY 2009 budget recommends an increase of \$1,024,000 (counting allowance for pay costs) to cover hiring new inspectors to handle additional responsibilities as the number of licensed/registered facilities continues to grow.

## **APHIS / Investigative and Enforcement Services**

**We request that you support the President's request of \$13,694,000 for APHIS Investigative and Enforcement Services (IES).** We appreciate the Committee's consistent support for this division, which handles many important responsibilities, including the investigation of alleged violations of the AWA and the initiation of appropriate enforcement actions. The President's budget recommends an increase of \$1,343,066 (counting allowance for pay costs) for IES in FY 2009, of which \$725,000 will be used to improve enforcement of federal animal welfare laws. The volume of animal welfare cases is rising significantly as new facilities become licensed and registered.

**Office of Inspector General / Animal Fighting Enforcement**

**We request that you support the President's requested increase of \$6,274,852 for the Office of Inspector General (OIG) to maintain staff, improve effectiveness, and allow investigations in various areas, including enforcement of animal fighting laws.** We appreciate the Committee's inclusion of funding and language in recent years for USDA's OIG to focus on animal fighting cases. Congress first prohibited most interstate and foreign commerce of animals for fighting in 1976, tightened loopholes in the law in 2002, and established felony penalties in 2007. We are pleased that USDA is taking seriously its responsibility to enforce this law, working with state and local agencies to complement their efforts. The Michael Vick case is the highest profile example of new federal efforts that have helped shine a spotlight on the barbaric practices of dogfighting and cockfighting. Dogs bred and trained to fight endanger public safety, and some dogfighters steal pets to use as bait for training their dogs. Cockfighting was linked to an outbreak of Exotic Newcastle Disease in 2002-2003 that cost taxpayers more than \$200 million to contain. It's also been linked to the death of at least 9 people in Asia reportedly exposed through cockfighting activity to bird flu. Given the potential for further costly disease transmission, as well as the animal cruelty involved, we believe it is a sound investment for the federal government to increase its efforts to combat illegal animal fighting activity. We also support the OIG's auditing and investigative work to improve compliance with the humane slaughter law and downed animal rules.

**Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service / Veterinary Student Loan Forgiveness**

**We request \$1,000,000 to begin to fully implement the National Veterinary Medical Service Act (P.L. 108-161), specifically authorized in 2003, that received initial funding of \$500,000 in each of FY 2006 and FY 2007, and \$869,000 in FY 2008.** We appreciate that Congress has begun to address the critical shortage of veterinarians practicing in rural and inner-city areas, as well as in government positions at FSIS (Food Safety and Inspection Service) and APHIS. Having adequate veterinary care is a core animal welfare concern. A study released in June 2006 demonstrated the acute and worsening shortage of veterinarians working in rural farm animal practice, while domestic pets in both rural and urban areas are often left without necessary medical care. Veterinarians support our nation's defense against bioterrorism (the Centers for Disease Control estimate that 80% of potential bioterrorism agents are zoonotic - transmitted from animals to human). They are also on the front lines addressing public health problems associated with pet overpopulation, parasites, rabies, chronic wasting disease, bovine spongiform encephalopathy ("mad cow" disease), and a host of other concerns. To ensure adequate oversight of humane handling and food safety rules, FSIS must be able to fill vacancies in inspector positions. Veterinary school graduates face a crushing debt burden of over \$100,000 on average, and the lowest pay of any of the medical professions, with an average starting salary of \$46,000. For those who choose employment in underserved rural or inner-city areas or public health practice, the National Veterinary Medical Service Act authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to forgive student debt. It also authorizes financial assistance for those who provide services during federal emergency situations such as disease outbreaks. We hope you will build on the initial funding provided in order to expand this needed program under CSREES or such other account as the Committee deems appropriate.

**APHIS / Emergency Management Systems / Disaster Planning for Animals**

**We request that you support the President's request of \$996,000 for Animal Care under APHIS' Emergency Management Systems line item.** Hurricanes Katrina and Rita demonstrated that many people refuse to evacuate if they are forced to leave their pets behind. The Animal Care division has been asked to develop infrastructure to help prepare for and respond to animal issues in a disaster and incorporate lessons learned from previous disasters. These funds will be used for staff time and resources to support state and local governments' and humane organizations' efforts to plan for protection of people with animals. The additional resources will enable the agency to participate, in partnership with FEMA, in the newly revised National Response Plan without jeopardizing other Animal Care programs.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests. We will be grateful for your leadership in ensuring that funds necessary to protect both animals and people will continue to be available.

Sincerely,

  
Earl Blumenauer

  
Christopher Smith

Albert R. Wynn  
Albert Wynn

Norm Dicks  
Norman Dicks

Bill Pascrell Jr  
Bill Pascrell, Jr.

Ellen Tauscher  
Ellen Tauscher

Bill Delahunt  
William Delahunt

Tammy Baldwin  
Tammy Baldwin

Dennis J. Kucinich  
Dennis Kucinich

Sheila Jackson Lee  
Sheila Jackson Lee

Frank LoBiondo  
Frank LoBiondo

John Conyers, Jr.  
John Conyers, Jr.

Diana DeGette  
Diana DeGette

Tim Holden  
Tim Holden

Rescoe Bartlett  
Rescoe Bartlett

Adam Smith  
Adam Smith

Steven La Tourette  
Steven La Tourette

Charles Stenfelz  
Charles Stenfelz

David Wu  
David Wu

Jerrold Nadler  
Jerrold Nadler

Carolyn B. Maloney  
Carolyn Maloney

Nita Lowey  
Nita Lowey

Bart Gordon  
Bart Gordon

*Elton Gallegly*

Elton Gallegly

*Dan Burton*

Dan Burton

*Nick Rahall II*

Nick Rahall II

*Chaka Fattah*

Chaka Fattah

*Luis Gutierrez*

Luis Gutierrez

*Barney Frank*

Barney Frank

*Brad Sherman*

Brad Sherman

*Robert Wexler*

Robert Wexler

*James Moran*

James Moran

*Elijah Cummings*

Elijah Cummings

*Niki Tsongas*

Niki Tsongas

*Howard L. Berman*

Howard Berman

*Donald Payne*

Donald Payne

*Richard E. Neal*

Richard Neal

*George Miller*

George Miller

*Henry Waxman*

Henry Waxman

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David Price

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Eliot Engel

*Eleanor H. Norton*

Eleanor Holmes Norton

*Peter DeFazio*

Peter DeFazio

*Edward J. Markey*

Edward Markey

*Dale E. Kildee*

Dale Kildee

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Brad Miller

Betty Sutton

Dan Lipinski

Michael Honda

Russ Carnahan

Chris Van Hollen, Jr.

Emanuel Cleaver II

Michael Capuano

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John Hall

*Christopher Shays*

Christopher Shays

*Anthony Weiner*

Anthony Weiner

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Barbara Cubin

*Jim McDermott*

Jim McDermott

*Todd R. Platts*

Todd R. Platts

*Albio Sires*

Albio Sires

*Patrick Murphy*

Patrick Murphy

*Stephen Cohen*

Stephen Cohen

*James McGovern*

James McGovern

*Madeleine Z. Bordallo*

Madeleine Bordallo

*Tom Allen*

Tom Allen

*Henry Brown, Jr.*

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Phil Hare

*Lois Capps*

Lois Capps

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Judy Biggert

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Jan Schakowsky

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Rush Holt

*John Larson*

John Larson

*Paul Hodes*

Paul Hodes

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William Lacy Clay

*Allison Schwartz*

Allison Schwartz

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Ed Perlmutter

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Patrick Kennedy

Shelley Berkley  
Shelley Berkley

Jay Inslee  
Jay Inslee

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Mike Doyle

John Lewis  
John Lewis

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Peter King

Stephanie Herseth Sandlin  
Stephanie Herseth Sandlin

Michael Arcuri  
Michael Arcuri

Adam Schiff  
Adam Schiff

John Yarmuth  
John Yarmuth

Ron Klein  
Ron Klein

Jerry McInerney  
Jerry McInerney

Jim Gerlach  
Jim Gerlach

Charles Gonzalez  
Charles Gonzalez

Fortney H. "Pete" Stark  
Fortney H. "Pete" Stark

Frank Pallone, Jr.  
Frank Pallone, Jr.


Mike Thompson  
Mike Thompson


Doris Matsui  
Doris Matsui

Jon Porter  
Jon Porter


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Joseph Courtney


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Michael Ferguson

  
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Christopher Murphy

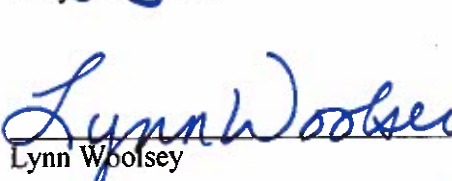
  
Mike Ross


  
Robert Brady

  
Debbie Wasserman Schultz

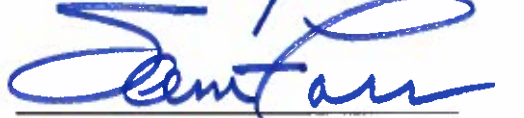
  
Jerry Weller


  
Mary Bono Mack

  
Lynn Woolsey

  
Bob Filner

  
Philip English

  
Sam Farr

  
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Edolphus Towns



Bruce Braley



Jim Saxton