

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 1, 2010

The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Secretary  
United States Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We are writing to express our continued concern regarding the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) rule updating the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program. While we strongly support including more healthy and nutritious fruits and vegetables in the WIC program, we are concerned and disappointed that fresh white potatoes continue to be excluded in the regulation.

We understand that during public comment period on the rule, over 4,300 comments were submitted, including 231 specifically regarding potatoes. Of those comments, 229 were supportive of including potatoes in the WIC program, and in fact 43 percent of those comments came from WIC program managers and staff. These key administrators of the WIC program expressed concern over the exclusion of potatoes, which are loaded with priority nutrients that have been identified by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) as lacking in the diets of young children.

And yet it was the IOM that recommended the exclusion of fresh potatoes from the WIC program. Indeed, potatoes are the only fruit or vegetable to be excluded, which sends a message to WIC participants that the U.S. Department of Agriculture believes potatoes are not healthy.

As you know, the WIC program is meant to assist low-income and nutritionally at-risk pregnant and breastfeeding women and their infants and children – individuals who often already face significant hurdles to ensure a balanced, healthy diet for themselves and their children. Potatoes allow WIC participants to supply much-needed nutrients to their families while maximizing their WIC program dollars.

Additionally, excluding potatoes will only create administrative burdens for participating grocers and vendors. The public comments, from both WIC program managers and staff, reflected this. The exclusion of only one fruit or vegetable is an unnecessary logistical complexity for all who use the WIC program – participants, grocers and vendors.

We also wish to remind you of the support included in the 2008 Farm Bill for “the inclusion of all fruits and vegetables in the federal nutrition programs where supported by science.” Potatoes provide an affordable and nutritious option for many WIC participants.

We therefore ask that you reconsider your decision and include white potatoes as part of a final rule updating the WIC program. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Patty Murray

Maria Canfield

Byron G. Simpson

Nora Fitzgerald

Ron Wyden

Jan Finkel

Mike Johnson

Wm F. B. A

My Baines

Angie Brown

Debbie Stabenow

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