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March 26, 2012

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue S.W.
Washington, DC 20252

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

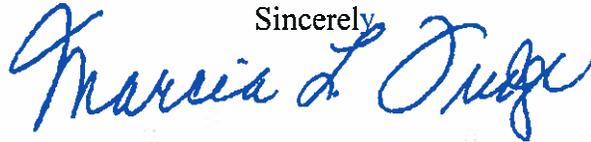
As Ranking Member of the Committee on Agriculture's Subcommittee on Department Operations, Oversight, and Credit, I write to inform you of my concerns regarding food safety in the United States. Food safety is an issue of critical importance to our nation's health and overall well-being. Foodborne diseases in the United States account for an estimated 48 million illnesses, 128,000 hospitalizations, and 3,000 deaths annually.

Last year, we witnessed the deadliest U.S. foodborne illness outbreak in 90 years when cantaloupes from Colorado-based Jensen Farms were linked to a multistate outbreak of lysteria monocytogenes infections. As of December 8, 2011, a total of 146 infections, 30 deaths, and 1 miscarriage had been reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention from 28 states. In 2011, we also saw the second largest meat recall in U.S. history. On July 29, 2011, USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service issued a public health alert due to concerns about illnesses caused by a multidrug resistant strain of *Salmonella* Heidelberg that was found in ground turkey. On August 3, 2011, Cargill announced the voluntary recall of 36 million pounds of ground turkey products. A second recall followed after USDA confirmed contamination in a sample from Cargill's Springdale, Arkansas facility. All of this happened *after* the passage of the Food Safety Modernization Act of 2010.

Recently, there have been media concerns surrounding lean finely textured beef (LFTB) manufactured by Beef Products, Inc. (BPI), alternatively referred to as "pink slime." LFTB has been allowed as a component of the ground beef that USDA purchases since the early 1990s. Of the 111,556,000 pounds of ground beef have been contracted for the National School Lunch Program, 7 million pounds-- approximately 6.5 percent-- is comprised of BPI's product. Because of the nature of LFTB and its presence in the school lunch program, we need to be absolutely certain of its safety and we need to ensure that our food products are properly labeled.

As this and other food product issues are brought to light and scrutinized by the media, I will look to USDA to verify that proper monitoring is being done and regulations that protect the safety of our nation's public are being enforced. That is the role of the federal government, and anything less does not fulfill our responsibility to our people.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Marcia L. Fudge". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "M".

Marcia L. Fudge
Member of Congress