

January 19, 2018

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Mr. Secretary:

The American meat and poultry industry is committed to providing safe, nutritious, and affordable meat and poultry products to consumers both in the United States and worldwide. To allow the industry to meet that challenge, the United States Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) must, by statute, provide inspection services. Without such services meat and poultry processing plants are prohibited by law from operating.

As the threat of a government shutdown becomes more real, so does the threat to the industry's ability to provide a critical component of the food supply. The Office of Management and Budget has for many years deemed essential those employees whose "activities [are] essential to ensure continued public health and safety, including safe use of food, drugs, and hazardous materials." That the Food Safety and Inspection Service's role is essential is highlighted by its mission statement: "FSIS is the public health Agency in the U.S. Department of Agriculture responsible for ensuring that the Nation's commercial supply of meat, poultry, and egg products is safe, wholesome, and correctly labeled and packaged."¹ And that conclusion is confirmed by history when, during past government shutdowns, FSIS inspectors were classified as "essential" personnel and not subject to work stoppage.

The meat and poultry industry is the most important component in the agricultural economy. A government shutdown that fails to classify FSIS inspectors as essential will disrupt not only the operations at meat and poultry processing plants and idle the approximately 500,000 people who work there, it will cause significant disruptions throughout the supply chain, from livestock producers who will be unable to market their animals to grocery stores that will not be able to stock the meat case.

¹ <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/wcm/connect/4189b213-cabe-4213-8a94-ecbd67ce7c9a/iimpact-workbook.pdf?MOD=AJPERES>

For the foregoing reasons, the undersigned respectfully request that FSIS meat and poultry inspectors be determined to be essential personnel in the event of a federal government shutdown.

Sincerely,

National Cattlemen's Beef Association
National Chicken Council
National Pork Producers Council
National Turkey Federation
North American Meat Institute

Cc: Mick Mulvaney, Director, Office of Management and Budget