

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

December 8, 2010

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

During your forthcoming meetings with Mexican officials, we urge you to emphasize the importance of full Mexican implementation of the 2003 potato trade protocol between the U.S. and Mexico.

As you know, the 2003 agreement was intended to finally resolve disagreement over cross-border access for fresh potatoes. We are disappointed with the continued limited entry for U.S. produce, and Mexico has not adhered to the additional access provisions formally negotiated in 2007. As strong trading partners, it is crucial that the Department continue to stress the importance of abiding by the terms of the protocol.

At present, Mexico only allows market access to the 26-kilometer zone of the United States-Mexico border. However, the 2007 addendum declares that market access will expand to the northern states of Mexico in 2008, with discussions set to occur regarding the rest of Mexico in 2009. Regrettably, Mexico has not yet opened the additional regions to U.S. potatoes. This is particularly troubling, given that the Mexican potato market is worth about \$30 million per year to U.S. producers. As a result, American growers are denied a significant trade opportunity, which industry estimates could eventually exceed \$130 million per year. These lost markets exacerbate the current economic climate, as these exports could translate to significant employment growth in the agricultural sector.

We applaud the Department for its considerable effort in resolving this trade situation. In the international marketplace, the U.S. needs to be aggressive in resolving such disputes. We appreciate your efforts to expand U.S. access to fresh potatoes markets in Mexico, and wish you a productive visit.

Sincerely,



MIKE CRAPO
United States Senator



JAMES E. RISCH
United States Senator



PATTY MURRAY
United States Senator