

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

August 23, 2012

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

Mr. Secretary:

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) recently suspended operations of Central Valley Meat Company in Hanford, California, based on allegations of animal cruelty. As a result, hundreds of employees have been idled, causing enormous economic stress in a community with double-digit unemployment. The shutdown has also lowered the price of beef in the region, resulting in further economic hardship for farmers.

We write to urge the immediate reopening of this facility in order to relieve the plight of its hard-working employees who need to provide for their families. If the plant remains closed, the local economy will be devastated. This will serve no legitimate public interest and will do nothing to further the goal of appropriately responding to the alleged abuse.

In our view, the public interest is best served by quickly deploying the necessary personnel to supervise the plant's resumption of operations under conditions that meet appropriate regulations. You have had ample time to do this. The investigation can and should continue, but does not necessitate a prolonged and economically disastrous full stoppage of operations. Furthermore, your agency should more aggressively clarify the fact that our food supply is not – and never was – in jeopardy as a result of this alleged violation.

It is also important to note that USDA had a number of full-time inspectors on duty during the period in which the alleged violations occurred. Despite their active presence throughout the facility at the time, there is no record of non-compliance. In the strongest possible terms we urge you, as the head of the Agency charged with a science-based approach to securing the United States food supply, to intervene against the onslaught of attacks that are occurring at the behest of radical groups.

Please show your compassion for the hard-working men and women who are now unemployed as a result of this allegation and your agency's actions and restore operation of the Hanford plant immediately.

Sincerely,



DEVIN NUNES
Member of Congress



KEVIN MCCARTHY
Member of Congress



JEFF DENHAM
Member of Congress