

December 22, 2005

The Honorable Michael O. Johanns  
Secretary of Agriculture  
United States Department of Agriculture  
Jamie L. Whitten Federal Building  
12<sup>th</sup> and Jefferson Drive, SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Johanns:

We are writing to urge the timely release of the grass-fed label standard for red meat, as drafted by the Agricultural Marketing Service's Livestock and Seed Program under the USDA Process Verified Program.

In December of 2002, USDA's Livestock and Seed Program office published for public comment a set of thirteen label claims and production standards for red meat. Over tens of thousand farmers, ranchers and consumers around the country responded to the USDA announcement by requesting a rewrite of four of the thirteen proposed standards. Those four claims pertained to grass-fed, free-range, antibiotics, and hormones. In response to the public response, the Agricultural Marketing Service withdrew the four standards in question and then met with a diverse set of stakeholders who had invested in these growing, new markets. We greatly appreciated the effort made by AMS staff and have respected the process.

We believe USDA now has an excellent opportunity to move forward on all four label claims, starting with a standard for the grass-fed claim. Many groups have had the opportunity to weigh in on standards for a USDA process verified grass-fed meat label that has meaning to the consumer, adds economic value to an agricultural commodity, and, most importantly, reflects production practices specific to farmers and ranchers raising grass-fed livestock. Producers raising and marketing grass-fed animals and organizations representing grass-fed, sustainable and organic farmers and ranchers, consumers, environmental interests, animal welfare, and the retail sector all agree that a USDA process verified standard and label claim for grass-fed meat does not conflict with other USDA certified standards and is critical to the continued growth of this important niche market.

Again, it is our hope that USDA will move quickly to approve and publish for comment the tough but fair standard drafted by AMS in consultation with producers and organizations that have stake in this value-added market. We feel strongly that there is an important role for the federal government in protecting the integrity of marketplace standards for this product that has become so important to so many producers and consumers.

Thank you in advance for your time and work on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Sustainable Agriculture Coalition  
Environmental Defense  
National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture/Organic Committee  
Organic Valley/CROPP Cooperative  
National Organic Coalition  
Organic Consumers Association  
Cornucopia  
Northeast Organic Dairy Producers  
Pennsylvania Certified Organic  
American Grass-fed Association  
National Bison Association  
Keep Antibiotics Working Campaign  
Union of Concerned Scientists  
Center for Food Safety  
Food Animal Concerns Trust  
Carolina Farm Stewardship  
New England Small Farms Institute  
Grass Works  
Land Stewardship Project  
Center for Rural Affairs  
Delta Land and Community  
The Minnesota Project  
Minnesota Farmers Union  
Western Sustainable Agriculture Working Group  
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy

cc: Lloyd C. Day  
Ken Clayton  
Barry Carpenter