

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 15, 2011

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We are concerned about the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) proposed changes to the School Breakfast and the National School Lunch Programs, and we urge you to reconsider those changes.

We understand the proposed rule for the School Breakfast Program would eliminate fresh white potatoes. We further understand that the proposed rule would limit starchy vegetables (potatoes, corn, green peas, and lima beans) in the National School Lunch Program to only one cup per week. By drastically limiting a cost-effective, nutrient-dense vegetable, white potato, from the school meal menu, we believe these rules are inconsistent with efforts to promote better nutrition for our children.

The proposed rules for these two important programs contradict the recently-published 2010 Dietary Guidelines which encourage children to consume more of four “nutrients of concern,” two of which are potassium and fiber. As you know, potatoes are a rich source of both of these nutrients. With just 110 calories, a potato contains more potassium than a equivalent sized banana and more fiber than a serving of broccoli.

At a time when many national initiatives ranging from the new Dietary Guidelines to the USDA’s Team Nutrition program are promoting increased vegetable consumption, it makes little sense to eliminate a vegetable we know children will eat. In fact, studies have shown that potatoes are a “gateway vegetable.” Recent research by Dr. Adam Drenowski from the University of Washington shows that children who eat potatoes at lunch are more likely to consume significantly more total servings of vegetables throughout the day than children who do not eat potatoes at lunch.

In addition to being nutrient-dense, potatoes are a cost-effective use of school meal program dollars. For less than five cents per potato, school meal programs can meet nutrition requirements on several fronts. By eliminating this choice and others, the USDA’s own estimates indicate that the cost to schools will increase by \$6.8 billion over five years. At a time when school budgets are shrinking, we should not limit cost-effective choices for our schools

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of nutrients from school lunches. Reducing fried food intake can occur without limiting valuable nutrition sources such as potatoes.

We urge you to reconsider the proposed rule and ensure that cost-effective, nutrient-rich potatoes are available to all of our students.

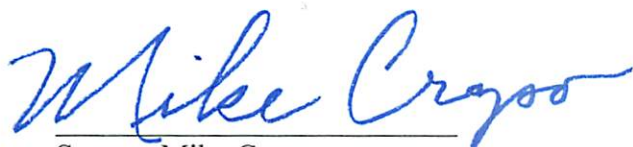
Sincerely,



Senator Maria Cantwell



Senator Patty Murray



Senator Mike Crapo



Senator James Risch



Congressman Jay Inslee



Congressman Rick Larsen



Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rogers