

# SAFE FOOD COALITION

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The Honorable Mike Johnson  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Thune  
Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Minority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

July 8, 2026

## **Re: Safe Food Coalition Opposes Farm Bill Provision to Deregulate Meat and Poultry Inspection and Increase Foodborne Illness Risk**

Dear Speaker Johnson, Majority Leader Thune, Minority Leader Jeffries and Minority Leader Schumer:

The undersigned members of the Safe Food Coalition write to urge you to oppose Section 12110 of the “Agricultural Act of 2026” or Farm Bill 2.0, which would lift prohibitions on the interstate sale of meat and poultry that has not been subject to USDA inspection.<sup>1</sup> Formerly introduced as the standalone Direct Interstate Retail Exemption for Certain Transactions Act (“DIRECT Act”), Section 12110 would compromise long established food safety standards for consumers in exchange for speculative, thinly supported benefits, while undercutting state governments that have invested in meeting existing requirements for state-inspected meat and poultry products to be sold in interstate commerce.

We first wrote to congressional leaders in 2021 to oppose the DIRECT Act.<sup>2</sup> Since then, the current Administration has carried out an assault on the nation’s public health infrastructure, diminishing local health officials’ capacity to detect foodborne illness outbreaks,<sup>3</sup> and adding to the concerns surrounding this reckless legislation. Rather than stripping away food safety protections, Congress can better support small processors by appropriating adequate funding for technical assistance, and reforming USDA’s overtime inspection fee system.

Section 12110 would amend the Federal Meat Inspection Act, 21 U.S.C. 661, and the Poultry Products Inspection Act, 21 U.S.C. 454, to allow establishments and retailers to “sell over the internet

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.agriculture.senate.gov/agricultural-act-of-2026-farm-bill-20>

<sup>2</sup> <https://consumerfed.org/testimonial/safe-food-coalition-opposes-latest-bill-to-deregulate-meat-and-poultry-inspection/>

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/cdc-quietly-scaled-back-surveillance-program-foodborne-illnesses-rcna227089>; see also <https://consumerfed.org/news/testimony-comments/broad-group-of-stakeholders-asks-congress-to-fund-cdc-food-safety-program/>

and ship by carrier in commerce” state-inspected meat and poultry, so long as the product “is shipped directly to household consumers and in normal retail quantities.”<sup>4</sup> This would represent a dramatic overhaul of the nation’s food safety system, potentially allowing consumers to buy state-inspected meat and poultry on sites like Amazon.com, without even knowing it.

In the past, the DIRECT Act’s proponents have maintained that the bill’s changes are “small and simple” in part because state meat and poultry inspection (MPI) programs are already required to meet standards to demonstrate they are “at least equal to” federal inspection standards.<sup>5</sup> However, state MPI programs deemed “at least equal” to the federal inspection program are not actually “equal.” As FSIS Guidance explains, the “‘at least equal to’ standard . . . does not require the States operate their MPI programs in a manner that is the same as or identical to FSIS’s inspection program,” but rather to “operate in a manner that is not less effective than those standards adopted for the Federal inspection program.”<sup>6</sup> A state MPI may meet the “at least equal to” standard without, for example, having authority under state law to provide the same inspection services as FSIS inspectors in Federal establishments.

Ten state MPI programs enrolled in USDA’s Cooperative Interstate Shipment (CIS) program are required to have such authority. In those states, USDA allows state inspected processors enrolled in the CIS program to ship across state lines.<sup>7</sup> The other 17 states with meat or poultry inspection programs of their own may enroll in the CIS program at any time by meeting the requirements of the program. Allowing interstate sales of products inspected under those regimes, regardless of whether they meet the requirements of the CIS program, would subject consumers to unjustifiable foodborne illness risk.

In particular, Section 12110 would heighten the risk that ineffective recalls expose consumers to contaminated meat and poultry. Federal regulators are responsible for recalls of state-inspected meat sold in interstate commerce under the CIS program.<sup>8</sup> As with all other meat and poultry sold in interstate commerce, they have authority to seize and detain product that is not recalled effectively, if the recalling establishment fails to conduct an adequate recall. By contrast, FSIS is not responsible for providing oversight and enforcement of inspection rules under state MPI programs outside of CIS, and state MPI program officials lack jurisdiction to conduct recalls beyond their state borders.

Expansion of state-inspected slaughter should not come at the expense of consumer safety. Should states wish to accommodate the interstate-shipment of state-inspected meat and poultry, there is already a means to do so safely: the CIS program. That program requires states and participating establishments to undergo additional certifications, which ensure that they can meet all federal requirements for shipping products across state lines, including the determination that the state has adequate legal authority over establishments to enforce regulations and proper staffing. Efforts to further expand interstate shipment of state-inspected meat and poultry products are most appropriately channeled towards improving the CIS program.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/1512/text?s=1&r=31>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.marshall.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/sen-marshall-introduces-bipartisan-bill-to-support-livestock-producers/>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.fsis.usda.gov/sites/default/files/import/At\\_Least\\_Equal\\_to\\_Guidelines.pdf](https://www.fsis.usda.gov/sites/default/files/import/At_Least_Equal_to_Guidelines.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> See <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/inspection/state-inspection-programs/cooperative-interstate-shipment-program>

<sup>8</sup> See [https://www.fsis.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media\\_file/2021-02/2008-0039F.pdf](https://www.fsis.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media_file/2021-02/2008-0039F.pdf)

We respectfully urge you to consider these issues, and to maintain the requirement that meat and poultry shipped in interstate commerce must be “USDA Inspected and Approved.”

Sincerely,

Center for Food Safety  
Center for Science in the Public Interest  
Consumer Federation of America  
Consumer Reports  
Food & Water Watch  
Institute for Food Safety and Nutrition Security  
National Consumers League  
Stop Foodborne Illness