

SAFE FOOD COALITION

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June 13, 2018

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition
& Forestry
United States Senate
109 Hart Bldg
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition
& Forestry
United States Senate
133 Hart Bldg
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Roberts and Ranking Member Stabenow:

The undersigned members of the Safe Food Coalition urge you to vote against the New Markets for State-Inspected Meat and Poultry Act of 2018, [S. 2814](#), as an amendment to the Farm Bill. Portrayed as an effort to stimulate new small businesses, this legislation would operate to harm many small businesses, and it would threaten the health of American consumers.

In a nutshell, S.2814 would substitute uneven state inspection standards and enforcement for USDA's meat and poultry inspection program. As a result, the bill would likely increase foodborne illness risk in the United States. Proponents of S.2814 point out that it would only apply to states where USDA has declared the meat inspection system "at least equal to" the federal system. But that label is a misnomer. Where state inspection is actually "equal" to federal inspection, USDA already allows state inspected processors to ship across state lines through the Cooperative Interstate Shipment (CIS) program. By contrast, the significance of USDA's "at least equal to" standard is unclear. A USDA Office of Inspector General [review](#) found that USDA failed to document how it evaluates "equal" state meat and poultry inspection programs, and in some cases, the agency made determinations in favor of state programs with alarming deficiencies. Unfortunately, this bill does nothing to ensure greater consistency among state meat and poultry inspection programs, for which funding and staffing levels vary considerably.

The sweeping provisions of this bill raise a host of other concerns. Because no state has authority to manage a recall of adulterated food that has left its jurisdiction, the bill would increase the risk that adulterated meat and poultry will be sold and consumed. The bill would force state governments to allow the sale of meat and poultry products inspected by state programs with questionable safety records, even if they believe federal inspection is the best way to protect their citizens against foodborne illness. The bill would create unfair competition for those very small meat and poultry processors who have invested the time and money necessary to comply with federal inspection requirements to qualify as "USDA inspected and approved." The bill would seriously undermine the federal meat and poultry inspection system by making *any and all* federally inspected

meat and poultry plants eligible to flee federal inspection in favor of less rigorous state inspection, and by permitting plants to switch back and forth between federal and state inspection programs at will. Finally, the bill would undermine public confidence in the safety of the food supply and the integrity of the government because none of these issues has been the subject of hearings in either house of Congress.

Such hearings are critical to allow consumers and public health experts to discuss their concerns. Prior to voting on this bill, Congress should take a closer look at state meat and poultry inspection, and ask USDA to explain how it might address major food safety issues, such as recalls of state inspected meat and poultry. Attaching this legislation to the Farm Bill would not allow for the deliberation these issues deserve.

Congress passed the *Wholesome Meat Act of 1967* and the *Wholesome Poultry Products Act of 1968* because state inspection standards and enforcement were uneven and often did not protect consumers. The New Markets for State-Inspected Meat and Poultry Act of 2018 threatens to condemn the country to relearn those lessons. 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 Foodborne Illness, Research & Prevention

Center for Food Safety

Consumer Federation of America

Food & Water Watch

Government Accountability Project

National Consumers League

Stop Foodborne Illness