United States Senate
COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET
WASHINGTON, DC 20510–6100

October 9, 2012

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

Thank you for your response regarding USDA's partnership with Mexican consulates to encourage foreign nationals, migrant workers, and non-citizen immigrants to enroll in food stamps and fourteen other USDA-administered welfare programs. I appreciate your thoughtful reply.

As I expressed in my previous letter, I have serious concerns about this initiative. It defies rational thinking for the United States—now dangerously $16 trillion in debt—to partner with foreign governments to help us place more foreign nationals on American welfare, and it is contrary to good immigration policy for the United States. Yet the current Administration has conducted approximately 30 meetings and activities with the Mexican government in furtherance of this controversial alliance.

Your letter asserts that "we do not pressure any eligible person to accept benefits, nor is our goal to simply increase the number of program participants." But the content of USDA's advertisements and promotion campaigns demonstrate otherwise. For instance, there is the Spanish radio "novella"—taken down only weeks ago after criticism—whose entire premise is pressuring an individual to accept food stamps benefits despite her protestations. Your department provides a document on how to "overcome the word 'No'" and awarded a recruitment worker for overcoming people's "mountain pride." There is even a promotional guide suggesting those targeted for enrollment harm their communities by not accepting benefits: "Each $5 dollars in new SNAP benefits generates almost twice that amount in economic activity for the community… Everyone wins when eligible people take advantage of benefits to which they are entitled." These are only a few of many examples.

I would therefore ask that you at once eliminate all materials, training and recruitment efforts that contradict your above statement.

It is time to restore the moral principles of the 1996 welfare reform law. Envisioning welfare benefits as temporary programs to assist those in need achieve financial independence is the compassionate goal for sound policy.

In order to learn more about USDA's operations as such reforms are considered, I would ask that the following additional information be provided to the Senate Budget Committee as soon as it becomes available, but no later than October 18, 2012:

1. A summary of each of the meetings, events, and activities alluded to in your most recent letter regarding the SNAP-Mexico partnership that have occurred since 2009
2. An estimate of how much is spent each year on food stamp benefits for non-citizens from 2001 through today, broken down by year
3. An explanation of USDA's legal understanding of the federal "public charge" immigration law as it applies to USDA-administered welfare and nutrition programs
4. Any guidance, including memos or emails, shared between USDA, DOS, or DHS concerning the "public charge" standard and USDA-administered welfare and nutrition programs
5. One 2011 USDA document entitled "The Benefits of Increasing the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Participation in Your State" declares that "[i]n Fiscal Year 2009, only 72 percent of those eligible for SNAP benefits participated," adding: "their communities lose out on the benefits provided by new SNAP dollars flowing into local economies." Forty-seven million Americans now receive food stamps. What share of the eligible population, including those categorically eligible, does USDA believe to be currently enrolled? If USDA's enrollment goals were reached, how many people would currently be receiving food stamps?

Thank you for your continued attention to these crucial matters.

Very truly yours,

Jeff Sessions
Ranking Member

JS:ph