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United States Senate

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May 19, 2021

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

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

I write today to urge the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to take action and support our hardworking farmers by ensuring our nation's taxpayer-funded school nutrition programs are not used to make political statements by disincentivizing the consumption of meat, all at the expense of our nation's animal agriculture workers, rural communities, and livestock producers.

Earlier this month, the Child Nutrition Labeling Program certified Impossible Foods' meat alternative products for use in school cafeterias around the country, making their imitation meat eligible for national school lunch funding.¹ School nutrition programs should be exempt from political statements dictating students' dietary options. Programs like "Meatless Monday" and other efforts to undermine meat as a healthy, safe and environmentally responsible choice hurt our agriculture industry and impact the families, farmers, and ranchers of rural states that feed our nation.

Animal proteins ensure students have a healthy diet that allows them to develop and perform their best in school. Real meat, eggs, and dairy are the best natural sources of high quality, complete protein according to Dr. Ruth MacDonald, chair of the Department of Food Science & Human Nutrition at Iowa State University. Meat, eggs, and dairy provide essential amino acids that are simply not present in plants. They are also natural sources of Vitamin B12, which promotes brain development in children, and zinc, which helps the immune system function properly.²

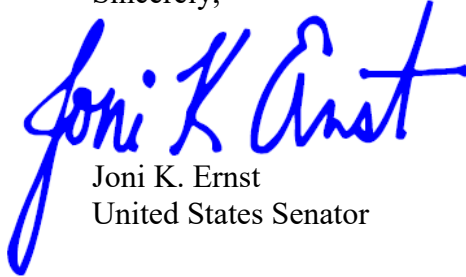
As a nation we need to support our producers and farmers and ensure our students have access to high-quality meals. We must advocate for and protect our rural communities who continue to feed and fuel the world. I am urging you to ensure that students will continue to have access to healthy school meal options that contain meat and to stand up to make sure political statements to disincentive meat consumption stay out of our taxpayer-funded school nutrition programs.

¹ <https://www.theverge.com/2021/5/7/22425006/impossible-foods-burgers-school-lunch-marketing-kids>

² <https://realfarmersrealfoodrealmeat.com/>

Thank you for your serious consideration of this request. We very much looking forward to continuing to work with you to support our farmers, ranchers and rural communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Joni K. Ernst". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Joni K. Ernst
United States Senator