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June 17, 2010

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Next week, you are scheduled to meet with Russian President Medvedev for talks on improved collaboration between our two nations, in advance of the G-8 summit in Canada. While in some areas the level of cooperation between our two countries has improved, irritants remain in that relationship that require attention at the highest level. For the past five months, the Russian Federation has blocked poultry imports from the United States over the use of chlorine rinses in the production process. We believe the stalemate in the negotiations requires the attention of the leaders of both countries. We urge you to include this issue on the agenda of your meeting with President Medvedev to ensure that importation rules are based on science and consistent with international standards.

Over the last three years, U.S. poultry exports to Russia averaged more than $800 million in value, making Russia our single largest export market. The poultry industry in this country represents over 500,000 jobs in the United States and has a significant impact on countless other communities across the country.

Since 1990, Russia has imported U.S. poultry that was processed using chlorinated water to reduce pathogens and enhance food safety. Throughout this period, Russian authorities did not express any concern. Therefore, the current ban seems arbitrary and capricious. Science has shown the use of chlorine solutions to be a safe and cost effective way to maintain food safety during poultry processing. Additionally, we understand Russia is still buying poultry from other suppliers, such as Brazil, where some facilities use the same process as those in the United States, without guarantees that they are not using chlorine solutions. This disparity appears to be contrary to the Russian government's assertions that its actions are being taken out of concern for the safety of its population.

The cumulative effect of the actions taken by Russia's government has been to keep U.S. products entirely out of the Russian market. We believe the United States and Russia should work together to promote trade between our two countries and lower barriers that undermine the bilateral relationship. Your meeting with the Russian President in advance of the upcoming G-8 summit offers a crucial opportunity to address this issue with the seriousness it deserves. We urge you to use all means at your disposal to address this situation and we thank you for working with us.

Sincerely,

Blanche L. Lincoln

Saxby Chambliss

Mike Johanns

Jim Webb

Mark R Warner

Ted Kaufman

Mark Pryor

Kay R. Hagan

John Thune

Mary L. Landrieu

Kit Bond

cc: The Honorable Ron Kirk, United States Trade Representative
The Honorable Tom Vilsack, Secretary of Agriculture
Michael Froman, Deputy National Security Advisor for International Economic Affairs