

Repeal the USDA Catfish Inspection Program

SAVINGS IN MILLIONS OF DOLLARS

2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2016-2020	2016-2025
\$14	\$14	\$14	\$14	\$14	\$14	\$14	\$14	\$14	\$14	\$70	\$140

Heritage Recommendation:

Repeal the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA’s) catfish inspection program. This proposal saves \$14 million annually, and \$140 million over 10 years.

Rationale:

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates domestic and imported seafood. However, the 2008 farm bill created a special exception requiring the USDA to regulate catfish that is sold for human consumption. This program, which has not yet been implemented, would impose costly duplication because facilities that process seafood, including catfish, would be required to comply with both FDA and USDA regulations.

The evidence does not support the health justifications for the more intrusive inspection program. There has been wide bipartisan opposition to the program. The GAO has criticized the program, publishing a 2012 report with the not-so-subtle title “Seafood Safety: Responsibility for Inspecting Catfish Should Not Be Assigned to USDA.”⁴⁵ Another GAO report succinctly summarized most of the problems, noting that the program “would result in duplication of federal programs and cost taxpayers millions of dollars annually without enhancing the safety of catfish intended for human consumption.”⁴⁶

The USDA catfish inspection program would also have serious trade implications. Foreign exporters selling catfish under FDA requirements would need to establish a new regulatory system equivalent to the USDA program. This approval process could take years.

Catfish-exporting countries, such as Vietnam, would likely retaliate and win any trade disputes because the program would be an unjustified trade barrier. The retaliation would likely come against industries other than the catfish industry, such as milk producers or meat packers. American consumers also would suffer because this program would reduce competition.

Additional Reading:

- Daren Bakst, “Addressing Waste, Abuse, and Extremism in USDA Programs,” Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 2916, May 30, 2014, <http://www.Heritage.org/research/reports/2014/05/addressing-waste-abuse-and-extremism-in-usda-programs>.
- Daren Bakst, “Farm Bill: Taxpayers and Consumers Are Getting Catfished,” *The Daily Signal*, November 19, 2013, <http://dailysignal.com/2013/11/19/farm-bill-taxpayers-consumers-getting-catfished/>.
- U.S. Government Accountability Office, “High Risk Series: An Update,” GAO-13-283, February 2013, pp. 198-199, <http://www.gao.gov/assets/660/652133.pdf>.
- U.S. Government Accountability Office, “Seafood Safety: Responsibility for Inspecting Catfish Should Not Be Assigned to USDA,” GAO-12-411, May 2012, <http://www.gao.gov/assets/600/590777.pdf>.



Calculations:

As reported on pages 19–20 of U.S. Government Accountability Office, “Seafood Safety: Responsibility for Inspecting Catfish Should Not Be Assigned to USDA,” *Report to Congressional Requesters* GAO-12-411, May 2012, <http://www.gao.gov/assets/600/590777.pdf>, the proposed catfish program would cost the federal government and industry an estimated \$14 million annually, with the federal government bearing 98 percent of the cost. This GAO report notes that the reported estimate of \$14 million annually may understate the true costs of the program.