

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 19, 2016

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

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We write to acknowledge the work USDA is doing to address the range of market access barriers China maintains on American agricultural exports. As you do so, we encourage you not only to focus on creating market access for products currently excluded from the market, but also to be vigilant to new barriers that may be eroding market access for products that have enjoyed export growth in recent years, in particular alfalfa hay.

Since China began importing American alfalfa in 2007, the market has been growing and spurring responsible and sustainable production here in the United States. As China's middle class grows, its demand for fresh milk has also grown. A key factor in increasing milk yields from dairy cattle is high-quality feed. American alfalfa is among the highest quality feeds in the world, and its acceptance into the Chinese market is a positive for both our producers and, ultimately, Chinese consumers. As you know, China has prohibited imports of genetically modified organism (GMO) crops since 2001, although they have made periodic exceptions. American alfalfa exporters have reoriented their production and methods to meet this requirement, and export the highest-quality alfalfa in the world that is not grown from GMO seeds or in GMO-contaminated fields. Alfalfa for export to China is tested here in the United States at the expense of the producers to ensure that it meets China's standards.

However, China began imposing more elaborate tests to verify exporters' shipments, tests which are in some instances showing trace amounts of GMO trait that do not appear in the origination testing. Shipments have been delayed and sometimes rejected due to these trace amounts found in destination testing, despite the fact that these trace levels may have been picked up from the ordinary shipping process and not the farm. Trace GMOs are commonly found in agriculture exports when tested at the destination, and can be picked up in a variety of places, including the shipping containers in which the shipments are transported or on the docks.

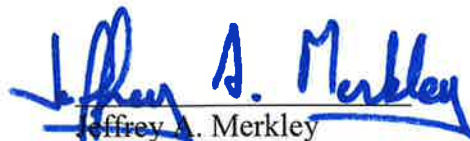
We urge you to address this issue without delay, so that the market access gains enjoyed by American alfalfa exporters are not lost. There are a range of possible solutions that could be pursued. However this issue is approached, it is critical that it be addressed expeditiously and in a manner that provides American alfalfa exporters with a cost-effective, predictable solution to ensure reliable access to China's market.

We look forward to continuing to work with you to resolve this issue, which is of key concern to our constituents.

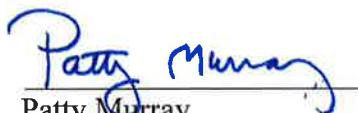
Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Patty Murray
United States Senator



Maria Cantwell
United States Senator

Cc: Ambassador Michael Froman, United States Trade Representative