

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

June 2, 2010

The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
14<sup>th</sup> and Independence, NW  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We request that as the U.S. Department of Agriculture finalizes the rule for including fruits and vegetables in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), you consider amending the rule to include fresh, white potatoes.

As you are aware, over a time period that exceeds your tenure at the USDA, many members of Congress have followed the progress of your agency's process to develop and implement a rule to include fruits and vegetables in the WIC program. We applaud you and your agency for those efforts. Including fruits and vegetables as a part of the WIC is an appropriate step to improve the healthy dietary choices and nutritional intake of WIC participants. However, we are greatly concerned that the exclusion of fresh white potatoes from the WIC voucher program, when all other fruits and vegetables are included, ignores the nutritional value of white potatoes and their potential to contribute to healthy lifestyles for WIC participants.

On February 1, 2010, the comment period for the final rule on the inclusion of fruits and vegetables in WIC closed. It is our understanding that of the 231 comments that addressed the role of fresh white potatoes in WIC, all but two anonymous comments favored their inclusion. Moreover, nearly 45 percent of the supportive comments were from WIC program managers and staff from all across the country, and another eight percent were from policy makers and state government organizations. The following comment submitted to the Federal Register from a registered dietician is representative of the comments:

*"The exclusion of fresh, white potatoes from the list of allowable fresh fruits and vegetables is unwise, unfair and unhealthy for all involved. As a registered dietician I know there is no scientifically sound, nutritionally based reason for excluding fresh, white potatoes from the WIC program. Fresh potatoes are more nutrient dense than other starch vegetables. Yet other starchy vegetables were included on the list. Only potatoes have been singled out for exclusion and that is wrong. ... Fresh potatoes are very popular among all kinds of people. Including them would make the WIC offerings more attractive to participants. Furthermore, fresh potatoes average just 25 cents a serving, so they are particularly affordable and would make WIC dollars go further. Do the right thing. Put fresh, white potatoes on the list of allowable vegetables for the WIC program."*

Comments from dietary and nutrition professionals who are directly involved with the WIC program repeatedly noted in the submitted comments the importance of fresh, white potatoes as a valuable source of vitamin C, potassium, vitamin B6, and fiber. Both vitamin C and fiber were identified by the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans as "nutrients of concern." Others

commented on the operational difficulty of excluding a single fruit and vegetable category and the confusing message this exclusion sends to WIC participants.

Based on our understanding of the comments filed by credible individuals and groups, we believe that there is ample evidence to support the inclusion of fresh, white potatoes in the WIC voucher program. In this case the scientific conclusions seem to follow common sense. Neither science nor common sense can support a public policy that makes such generally inconsistent recommendations as the exclusion of fresh, white potatoes from WIC.

We urge you to carefully consider both the quality and the quantity of the comments received by USDA that support including fresh, white potatoes along with all other fruits and vegetables in the WIC voucher program. If we can provide further input to you during your deliberations, please feel free to contact us.

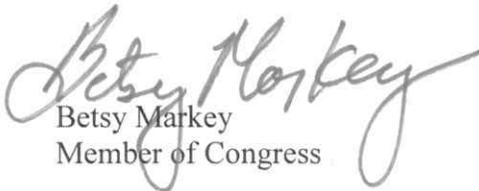
Best regards,



Greg Walden  
Member of Congress



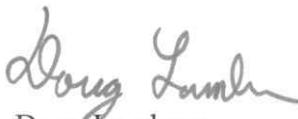
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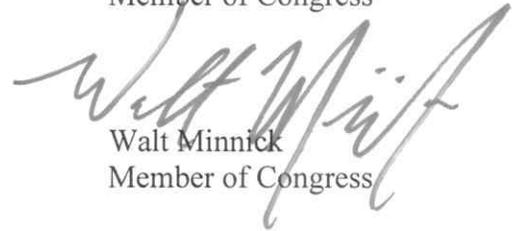
David Wu  
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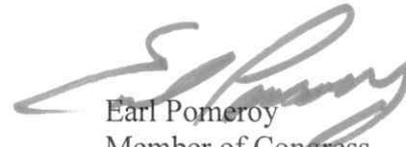
Earl Blumenauer  
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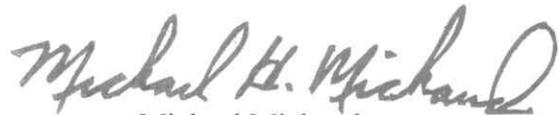
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