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AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

October 26, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue,

I write today to express my concern with the practice of dedicating a portion of annual assessment fees by agricultural research and promotion (R&P) commodity boards to fund cruel and inefficient animal experiments for certain agricultural products. These inhumane experiments are not in line with the supposed purpose of these boards to promote farmers' interests through research and marketing.

As you are aware, the annual assessment fees and the boards that collect them, also known as "checkoff fees" and "checkoff boards" respectively, are established and overseen by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS). Agricultural producers, handlers, processors, importers, and others in the farming sector pay the mandatory fees to support industry-wide research and marketing efforts. These fees totaled over \$885 million in 2016.¹ Failure to pay the assessment fees results in stiff penalties for farmers, many of whom are already struggling to make ends meet in the pandemic economy.

Disturbing publications from between 2015 and 2019 on research projects funded by R&P boards show more than 2,600 animals were doused, poisoned, force-fed, starved, irradiated, bled, suffocated, beheaded, or dissected. The experiments that utilized these barbaric practices were purportedly performed to assist with establishing health marketing claims associated with certain commodities, such as the benefits of consuming a particular fruit to human eye, bone, and cardiovascular health. The cruelty of these experiments, however, seems excessive given that the commodities in question, such as avocados, blueberries, mangos, mushrooms, raspberries, sorghum, soybeans, and watermelon, are generally considered to be safe for humans.

In light of the incongruity between the cruelty of these experiments and the commodities at study, the R&P boards should instead look to utilize new, innovative research technologies instead of wasting farmers' dollars on painful and ineffective animal experimentation. I therefore request that you formulate and share with Congress a timeline for phasing out the R&P boards' use of assessment fees to fund animal testing using your regulatory authority pursuant to the Commodity Promotion, Research, and Information Act of 1996.

¹ <https://www.gao.gov/assets/690/688519.pdf>

Thank you for your consideration of this request. For more information, please contact Christine Godinez (Christine.godinez@mail.house.gov) in my office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dina Titus". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dina Titus
Member of Congress