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COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION  
AND THE WORKFORCE

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
2181 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6100

November 19, 2013

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*Senior Democratic Member*

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The Honorable Debbie Stabenow  
Chairwoman  
Senate Committee on Agriculture  
Nutrition and Forestry  
133 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Agriculture  
Nutrition and Forestry  
113 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Frank Lucas  
Chairman  
House Committee on Agriculture  
2311 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Colin Peterson  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Agriculture  
2109 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow, Chairman Lucas and Ranking Members Cochran and Peterson:

I write to express my opposition to adding white potatoes to the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) food package by the conference committee of the Federal Agriculture Reform and Risk Management (FARRM) Act. As the Senior Democratic Member on the House Education and the Workforce Committee, which has jurisdiction over the WIC program, I believe it is inappropriate for the FARRM bill to address issues related to WIC. Second, as nutrition and anti-poverty advocates have repeatedly noted, adding white potatoes to the WIC food package is counter to the law's goal of increasing low-income women and children's access to nutritious food.

The WIC program is due for reauthorization in 2015 and any related federal policy changes would appropriately be addressed through that process. In the House of Representatives, WIC reauthorization would, by regular order, begin in the House Education and the Workforce Committee. The FARRM bill has no jurisdictional coverage of WIC in its titles, and making a significant policy change to WIC in the FARRM bill without the input of the committee of reference members would deny fair and comprehensive consideration of these critical issues for such a vulnerable population.

By law, WIC is a supplemental nutrition program that is intended to provide foods with nutrients that are lacking in WIC recipients' diets. Because potatoes are widely consumed, they do not need to be supplemented by WIC, which with its limited funds, needs to promote a variety of

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fruits and vegetables with important nutrients. Data from the Economic Research Service from 2011 found that potatoes are by far the most commonly eaten vegetable. White potatoes already account for nearly 27 percent of vegetables eaten by 2 and 3 year olds, according to the 2008 Feeding Infants and Toddlers Study. For that reason, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) recommended that white potatoes be excluded from the WIC food package: young children already eat sufficient amounts of them. Adding white potatoes to the WIC food package would displace other more nutritious vegetables.

In addition, white potatoes have been associated with health risks. In particular, increased consumption of white potatoes and potato chips has the largest positive association with weight gain than any other foods, according to a 2011 study published in the New England Journal of Medicine. This correlation with weight gain occurs whether the potatoes were fried, boiled, baked or mashed. These research findings are exactly why nutritional experts such as IOM, rather than Congress, should help determine what is in the WIC food package.

Decisions about limited federal resources for low-income women and their infants and toddlers' nutritional needs should not be made in the context of legislation focused on how to assist producers, where those political and policy dynamics may easily trump careful consideration of women and children's health issues. Advocates for low-income families, children's health, and the WIC program also oppose adding white potatoes to the WIC food package. It is inappropriate for the FARRM bill to make this change. Thank you for your consideration of these points in deciding this critical issue.

Sincerely,



**GEORGE MILLER**

Senior Democratic Member