



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

NOV 22 2011

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
United States Senate
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Madam Chair:

As required by section 3205(h) of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-246), the Department of Agriculture (USDA) submits this annual report describing the activities of the Consultative Group to Eliminate the Use of Child Labor and Forced Labor in Imported Agricultural Products (hereinafter referred to as the Consultative Group) to the Committees on Agriculture and Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate. Additionally, as directed in the Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying the Omnibus Appropriations Act, 2009, this report is provided to the Committees on Appropriations of the House of Representatives and the Senate.

As we reported to Congress in January, the Consultative Group presented its recommendations to me on December 21, 2010. I was pleased that the Group reached consensus on its recommendations, which contained a list of practices that should be considered by those who want to adopt a program to reduce child and forced labor in their supply chains. After considering the Group's report, I elected to issue guidelines based on its recommendations without change. On April 12, 2011, USDA published a Federal Register Notice to inform the public and seek comments on Guidelines for Eliminating Child and Forced Labor in Agricultural Supply Chains (Guidelines). The Notice and all public comments submitted in response to it are available on USDA's Web site at: http://www.fas.usda.gov/info/Child_labor/Childlabor.asp

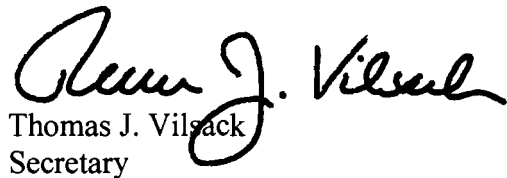
The response to the request for comments was disappointing to the members of the Consultative Group. The Federal Register Notice posed questions designed to encourage a dialogue about how the Guidelines could be adapted for use by individual industries or sectors, and Consultative Group members encouraged their colleagues to provide comments. Nevertheless, a public meeting, announced in the notice, had to be cancelled due to lack of comments. The comments that did come in by the end of the 90-day comment period indicated little interest in actual use of the Guidelines, particularly on the part of responders from the business community, who were the principal audience for which the Guidelines were developed. It was also clear from comments received that stakeholders have very different opinions about whether and how the government should be involved in encouraging implementation of the Guidelines.

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Page 2

Having carried out the activities provided for in the statute, the Consultative Group agreed that a new phase of activities should be undertaken to explore whether there is a lasting role for the Guidelines in the larger discussion about how to address child and forced labor in international agricultural supply chains. USDA is in discussion with the Departments of Labor and State, which have ongoing mandates and significant expertise to address these issues. An important element of this effort will be the identification of and engagement with additional stakeholders. USDA can continue to provide data and expertise on agricultural trade patterns that may be helpful as the group continues its work.

An identical letter has been sent to Senators Roberts, Kohl, and Blunt; Congressmen Lucas, Peterson, Kingston, Farr, and Berman; and Congresswoman Ros-Lehtinen.

Sincerely,



Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary