

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 23, 2015

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
US Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

We write today once again about the status of the “Hardwood Lumber and Hardwood Plywood Promotion, Research and Information Order,” also known as the “Hardwood Checkoff.” As you will recall, it was about this time last year that we wrote you concerned that the “Hardwood Checkoff,” as proposed could have harmful effects on our state’s forest products industry. It has now been a year since the comment period ended on the rule, and eight months since May of 2014 when “Final Action” was scheduled, yet the status of this rulemaking is still unclear.

To make matters worse, two industry groups interested in the proposed “Hardwood Checkoff,” both having met with USDA, have released contradictory information as to the status of the proposed rulemaking. One group insists that the Agriculture Marketing Service “has elected not to proceed further on the proposal” while another comments that “The Hardwood Checkoff. . . has been given a “green light” for further action at the United States Department of Agriculture.”

Naturally this state of affairs is confusing, and causing great concern within the Missouri Forest Products Industry, and with us. We would ask you to ensure that if the USDA is going to comment on the status of the “Hardwood Checkoff” proposal, that it do so in a clear and concise manner, so that all interested parties can understand what is occurring.

Based on the overwhelming number of comments opposed to the very existence of a Hardwood Checkoff, and based on the strong negative comments we are receiving from our own state’s industry, it seems to us that the issue should be dropped completely. If this is USDA’s intent, we would urge you to clarify this in writing. However, if USDA is determined to provide the “Blue Ribbon Committee” another opportunity to pursue a checkoff, it should be a completely new process that we hope would be more inclusive of the entire impacted industry. Specifically, we would ask you to address our concern that the voting system for accepting the checkoff should provide greater weight to smaller businesses, and not simply be a volume based metric.

Upon receiving notice of USDA's intentions regarding the "Hardwood Checkoff," we will determine if it is necessary to provide further comment on the process. We appreciate you resolving the confusion surrounding this issue as soon as possible. We look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,



JASON SMITH
Member of Congress



BILLY LONG
Member of Congress



SAM GRAVES
Member of Congress



BLAINE LUETKEMEYER
Member of Congress



VICKY HARTZLER
Member of Congress



ANNE WAGNER
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