

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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May 8, 2008

The Honorable Ed Schafer
Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Schafer:

Organizations and functions under your direction are categorized as high risk programs by the Government Accountability Office (GAO). GAO has found that federal oversight of food safety is at high risk. Transforming federal oversight of food safety was designated by GAO as being at high risk in 2007.

I am writing to express my concern that agencies responsible for the safety of the nation's food supply are not being effectively coordinated. Along with the Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Food and Drug Administration and Department of Homeland Security share this responsibility. It is well understood that institutional change is often complex and takes both time and resources to transform these often unwieldy programs. However, strategic planning and budgeting can yield staggering results with disciplined management and oversight. As Commissioner, you are uniquely positioned to guide this process.

The USDA currently has 70 reports with multiple issues identified by the GAO that remain outstanding. What actions has USDA taken to address these issues and achieve removal from the GAO high risk list in January 2009? Your prompt response is greatly appreciated.

Please do not hesitate to contact me or Sheldon Shoemaker of my staff at (202) 228-6476 if you would like to discuss these concerns or other matters.

Sincerely,



CLAIRE McCASKILL
United States Senator