United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 6, 2015

Ms. Chavonda Jacobs-Young
Administrator
Agricultural Research Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Administrator Jacobs-Young:

We write with strong concerns over purported oversight failures and poor conditions at the U.S Meat Animal Research Center ("The Center") in Clay Center, Nebraska, as described recently in an investigatory report published in the *New York Times* on January 19, 2015.

As you know, the report describes a number of startling instances over the last several decades in which cows, pigs, and sheep were alleged to be subjected to inhumane and dangerous conditions at The Center, which is administered by the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The article highlights significant gaps in the use of research oversight tools designed to protect the welfare of animals used for research, as well as the public interest.

Given the very serious nature of events outlined in the report, we urge the ARS to conduct a full investigation, report back to Congress with an assessment and determinations, and thoroughly review ARS protocols and standards to ensure appropriate oversight of animal research and care at The Center going forward.

Public investment in agricultural research has, and will continue to, yield broad benefits for American farmers, ranchers, and consumers. At the same time, this research must be conducted in a way that is consistent with the values of Americans who overwhelmingly support humane treatment for farm animals throughout our food system.

The USDA has a good track record for oversight of animal handling at slaughterhouses and within research laboratories. While we recognize that The Center is subject to different oversight rules, it appears to have not received that same level of attention. It is very important that USDA use this opportunity to review, enhance, and enforce animal use and care protocols and standards at its own research facilities to better reflect the transparent, accountable oversight to which it holds other institutions.

To that end, we commend ARS on appointing the first Animal Welfare Ombudsman and starting to craft a new Animal Welfare Strategy, to include improved training and oversight for employees at ARS facilities who work with animals. We also welcome the announced

independent review of agency research procedures and policies. Expectations for exceptional animal care must emanate from the highest level at USDA to ensure the integrity of our food system.

Thank you for your prompt attention. We look forward to receiving your initial response to this request as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Ron Wyden
U.S. Senator

Debbie Stabenow
U.S. Senator

Sherrod Brown
U.S. Senator

Jeanne Shaheen
U.S. Senator

Tammy Baldwin
U.S. Senator

Jeff Merkley
U.S. Senator

Bob Casey
U.S. Senator

Sheldon Whitehouse
U.S. Senator

Al Franken
U.S. Senator