



PEW COMMISSION ON  
INDUSTRIAL FARM  
ANIMAL PRODUCTION

August 31, 2009

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama,

According to media reports, governors from Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, Nebraska, North Carolina, Oklahoma and Wisconsin have asked for assistance for swine producers in their states to compensate for market losses caused by the economic downturn and the outbreak of swine flu. Those same reports indicate the governors have asked for \$200 million to help the swine industry in their states: \$50 million for additional federal food program purchases before the end of the current fiscal year, \$50 million for additional purchases in the next fiscal year from commodity purchasing programs, and \$100 million for the swine industry of the \$1 billion appropriated for addressing the swine flu virus. On behalf of the Pew Commission on Industrial Farm Animal Production, I am writing to urge that, as with the assistance for the auto industry and the financial sectors, this federal assistance should be tied to retooling and improving the swine industry.

The Pew Commission on Industrial Farm Animal Production was a two-year study funded by a grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts to Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. The charge to the Commission was to develop consensus recommendations that would address the public health, environment, rural community, and animal welfare problems created by industrial food animal production.

The final Commission report was released in April of 2008. The broad finding of the Commission was that the present system of industrial food animal production is not sustainable. In addition, the system presents an unacceptable level of risk to public health and damage to the environment, is harmful to the animals housed in the most intensive confinement systems, and is detrimental to the long-term economic activity of the communities where they are located. In addition, the Commission developed 24 primary recommendations addressing specific problems in each of the areas studied.

Several recommendations were developed after reviewing the prevalent production system for swine in the United States. Large, industrial swine operations commonly keep thousands of sows in restrictive confinement, routinely feed low levels of antibiotics (with little to no veterinary oversight) to compensate for overcrowding—which contributes to human antibiotic

resistance—and store waste in enormous lagoons that can cause serious health and environment problems. These practices led to the development of three of the Commissions' primary recommendations. The Commission recommended banning the non-therapeutic use of antibiotics and related drugs in food animal production, phasing out restrictive gestation crates, and phasing out all liquid waste management systems.

Any grant of federal assistance should be paired with changes to the swine production system that would not only improve the long-term sustainability of the industry, but also the environment, public health and rural communities. Such changes should include: phasing out the non-therapeutic use of antibiotics and requiring veterinary involvement in all antibiotic use in livestock, as recommended by the Federal Food and Drug Administration; replacing the gestation crate system with hoop barn or pen systems, and replacing liquid waste management systems with solid waste composting. Smithfield Foods, the largest swine producer in the country, has said it is suspending its program to phase out the restrictive gestation crate system due to the economic conditions facing the swine industry. Taking those three steps would ameliorate some of the most egregious problems created by the current industrial swine production system. In addition, making these changes would require more farmers involved in the production system, which would help the economies of rural communities, and could potentially open up international trade with countries that have production standards we are currently not meeting.

Any industry periodically needs to “retool”. This is the ideal time for the swine industry to do so, given the reduction in production capacity. In addition to making America healthier and cleaner, making these changes will allow the industry to rebound in a stronger export position and operate in a more sustainable manner.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Robert P. Martin  
Senior Officer  
Pew Environment Group  
former executive director of the Pew Commission on  
Industrial Farm Animal Production

cc. USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack