

## United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 11, 2014

COMMITTEES:  
HEALTH, EDUCATION,  
LABOR, AND PENSIONS

BUDGET

SPECIAL COMMITTEE  
ON AGING

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY  
AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY  
AND NATURAL RESOURCES

The Honorable Margaret Hamburg  
Food and Drug Administration  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
10903 New Hampshire Avenue  
Silver Spring, MD 20993

Dear Commissioner Hamburg:

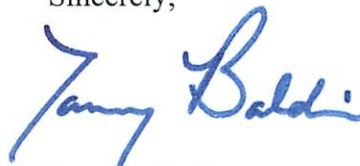
I am writing in regards to disturbing reports that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is pursuing policies to end the use of wooden boards in cheese aging. This has raised great concern among Wisconsin's cheese makers, who are currently aging 33 million pounds of cheese on these boards and whose businesses rely on this process. If these reports are true, the FDA should immediately cease any efforts to end the use of wooden boards in cheese aging. In addition, I am requesting that the FDA clarify its policy on cheese aging and enter into a transparent discussion about the role that wooden boards play in cheese processing and food safety.

On June 10<sup>th</sup>, the FDA issued a statement noting that the agency has not recently issued a policy banning the use of wooden boards in cheese making, and that the agency has not addressed the use of wooden boards under the Food Safety Modernization Act. Yet the cheese industry has received conflicting signals from the agency over the past several months, including agency statements that the use of wooden boards in cheese aging does not comply with food safety standards.

Wisconsin produces more cheese than any other state. We have a vibrant specialty cheese sector, which accounts for nearly a quarter of our cheese production. The vast majority of these specialty cheeses are aged in highly specific conditions which require wooden boards. Wisconsin's world-renown cheese makers have safely aged their cheeses on wooden boards for generations, and cheese makers have developed handling practices in line with food safety requirements to allow for their safe use. Changes in the FDA's cheese board policy would have serious ramifications for these businesses and, if the federal government intends to change these policies, cheese makers should be fully integrated into the process.

Food safety is critical to cheese makers and I share your goal of ensuring that the products we consume are safe. However, we must not rush ahead with policies that do not fully account for the impact they will have on industry and consumers. Thank you for considering this request. I look forward to a prompt response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tammy Baldwin". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping "T" and a cursive "Baldwin".

Tammy Baldwin