

January 21, 2010

The Honorable Harry Reid  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
S-221 The Capitol Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Republican Leader  
United States Senate  
S-230 The Capitol Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Reid and Republican Leader McConnell:

The undersigned food and agricultural organizations are writing to express their deep concern with the continuing delay in formal Senate approval of the nominations of Mr. Michael Punke to be Deputy U.S. Trade Representative based in Geneva, and Dr. Isi Siddiqui to be Chief Agricultural Negotiator in the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR). The U.S. needs strong leadership in these key positions and these gentlemen are eminently qualified to provide it.

On December 23, both nominations were approved by the Senate Finance Committee and, unless there are objections, a vote by the full Senate can now take place at any time. We urge the Senate to confirm Mr. Punke and Dr. Siddiqui at the earliest possible date.

U.S. farmers, ranchers, and food companies are dependent on export markets. U.S. food and agriculture exports are under assault in many markets with trading partners erecting even more barriers in recent months. Ambassador Kirk and the staff at USTR face myriad challenges in both lifting these trade barriers and enforcing U.S. trade rights as well as negotiating new market opportunities. It is imperative that Ambassador Kirk have his entire trade team in place. The longer the delay in confirming Mr. Punke and Dr. Siddiqui, the more likely that the U.S. loses exports and jobs.

There is no justifiable objection to either nominee based on their qualifications. Mr. Punke served as international trade counsel for the Senate Finance Committee, followed by four years dealing with international affairs in the Clinton administration. These included two years as senior policy adviser at USTR for Ambassador Mickey Kantor. His trade policy background in both the Congress and the Executive Branch will provide him with invaluable perspectives on what will be needed in Geneva to achieve a successful WTO agreement.

Dr. Siddiqui served as senior trade adviser to Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman before becoming vice president for science and regulatory affairs at CropLife America. Earlier, Siddiqui served as under secretary for marketing and regulatory programs at USDA and spent 28 years

with the California Department of Food and Agriculture. Dr. Siddiqui's work over the past several decades – both at the state and national level – will allow him to speak with expertise and authority in consultations with foreign agricultural negotiators.

We urge you to approve Mr. Punke and Dr. Siddiqui as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

American Cotton Shippers Association  
American Farm Bureau Federation  
American Farmland Trust  
American Feed Industry Association  
American Peanut Product Manufacturers, Inc.  
American Seed Trade Association  
American Soybean Association  
Blue Diamond Growers  
Commodity Markets Council  
Corn Refiners Association  
Distilled Spirits Council of the United States  
Grocery Manufacturers Association  
International Dairy Foods Association  
National Association of Wheat Growers  
National Barley Growers Association  
National Cattlemen's Beef Association  
National Chicken Council  
National Corn Growers Association  
National Cotton Council  
National Council of Farmer Cooperatives  
National Grain and Feed Association  
National Meat Association  
National Milk Producers Federation  
National Oilseed Processors Association  
National Pork Producers Council  
National Potato Council  
National Renderers Association  
National Sorghum Producers  
National Sunflower Association  
National Turkey Federation  
North American Equipment Dealers Association  
North American Export Grain Association  
Northwest Horticultural Council  
Pet Food Institute  
Sweetener Users Association  
U.S. Apple Association  
U.S. Canola Association  
U.S. Dairy Export Council

U.S. Wheat Associates  
USA Dry Pea and Lentil Council  
USA Poultry & Egg Export Council  
USA Rice Federation

cc: Members of the U.S. Senate