

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 12, 2024

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

We write regarding alleged inaccuracies in information publicly posted by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) on its website, specifically related to disclosures made under the Agricultural Foreign Investment Disclosure Act (AFIDA) Reports (FSA-153s).

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024 mandated the establishment of a streamlined process for electronic submission and retention of AFIDA disclosures, including an internet database. At the beginning of the year, the Government Accountability Office also recommended the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) analyze its ability to create an AFIDA online submission system and public database within its expected budget. However, we are concerned about the accuracy of information contained in these disclosures, which are still completed by hand on physical paper.

The current practice of manual data entry, including the re-typing of paper-filed reports into FSA systems, can lead to the publication of problematic and inaccurate information. We're told there have been instances where energy developers have been incorrectly identified as having ownership interests from sanctioned nations, when in reality the investment originates from U.S. allies. If true, such errors not only create confusion but also undermine the credibility of the data published by the FSA.


With these specific concerns in mind, we have the following questions:

- What measures is USDA taking to identify and correct inaccuracies in the publicly accessible database of AFIDA reports under current (i.e., handwritten submissions) submission requirements?
- How frequently is the FSA reviewing the information posted on its website for accuracy?
- What process does the FSA have in place for stakeholders to report inaccuracies in the published information, and how are these reports addressed?
- Are there plans to improve the accuracy of data entry to prevent future inaccuracies?
- What further direction from Congress—as specifically as possible—would the FSA need to transition to an online submission system?
- Are there opportunities for the online system to save the FSA staffing resources in the long-run?

We believe it is essential for the USDA to ensure that the information published on its website is accurate and reliable. Inaccurate information can have significant implications for various stakeholders and erodes public trust in the integrity of the reporting process. We hope to work with you to modernize FSA operations.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,




John Fetterman
United States Senator




Joni K. Ernst
United States Senator




Mike Braun
United States Senator




Pete Ricketts
United States Senator




Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



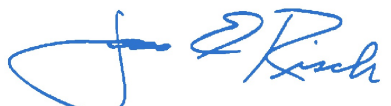
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