



## Catfish ads aimed at politicians

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The Catfish Farmers of America are running ads this week in *The Washington Post* and at *politico.com* calling for the same level of inspection for imported catfish to which domestic producers must adhere.

The battle to get Vietnam-raised pangasius under the same U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) inspection regime has turned into a political skirmish in Washington, D.C., where supporters for both sides lobby lawmakers and bureaucrats for and against the measure.

Pangasius presently are inspected by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Pangasius growers and suppliers say the proposed changes are aimed at trying to keep imported product out of the market because domestic producers can't or won't compete on price. Among the groups opposed to the changes are the National Fisheries Institute (NFI).

A final decision on the rule likely will come next year, as any preliminary determination will be subject to a public comment period.

NFI's support for pangasius is ironic, Joey Lowery, president of the Catfish Farmers of America, told IntraFish on Monday.

"What's ironic about that is, probably the best thing an imported product could have on it is a USDA seal of approval," Lowery said. "I think that would increase the marketability of the imported product, but they're fighting against it."

"The only thing I can think of is the fear of compliance; they don't think they can meet the standards we have to meet in this country."

Lowery wouldn't say how much it cost to run the ads, or how long they will run, but says domestic catfish farmers and processors are determined to fight for what they say is the improved food safety that would come from the proposed changes involving imported catfish.

"As long as we need to be," Lowery said when asked how long the ads will run. "This is a very serious matter that has been neglected, and this industry has made its mind up to do what we can to get this food safety problem right."

While the ads are aimed at the Washington decision makers, Lowery said the ads also will help improve public awareness about the topic. "People don't really know what's going on with seafood inspections. Our research indicated people really don't know what's going on; they really take it for granted their seafood is being inspected, and that's just not the case."



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