



United States Department of Agriculture

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United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

May 20, 2020

Marketing and  
Regulatory  
Programs

Washington, DC  
20250

The Honorable Mike Quigley  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2458 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C., 20515

Dear Congressman Quigley:

Thank you for your letter of April 27, 2020, cosigned by your colleagues, expressing concern about our Agency's enforcement of the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) with regard to certain animal exhibitors and urging us to expedite rulemaking that would amend and strengthen the AWA licensing and license renewal requirements.

We are pleased that on May 13, 2020, our Agency published to the Federal Register a final rule to amend licensing provisions in the AWA. This rule will promote compliance, reduce licensing fees and burdens, and strengthen existing safeguards that prevent individuals and businesses with a history of noncompliance from obtaining a license or working with regulated animals. Officials with our Agency's Animal Care program are currently working with AWA-licensed facilities to assist them as they implement this new approach.

We take very seriously our responsibility to protect animals covered under the AWA and assure you we are committed to enforcing the law to the fullest extent of our authorities and resources. As warranted, we have vigorously pursued action against licensees featured in *Tiger King*, including revoking the license of Mr. James B. Garretson in December 2007 and cancelling the license of Mr. Joe Schreibvogel Maldonado Passage ("Joe Exotic") after he failed to timely renew his license in December 2018. In April 2020, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Office of the Judicial Officer affirmed a USDA administrative law judge's decision to revoke the license of Mr. Timothy L. Stark and his businesses Wildlife In Need and Wildlife In Deed, Inc. and jointly and severally assess them a \$340,000 civil penalty. Mr. Stark now has the right to seek judicial review, should he choose, in an appropriate U.S. District Court. We continue to closely monitor other licensees included in the show who exhibit animals to the public to ensure compliance with the law's requirements and will take appropriate enforcement action as warranted.

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Again, thank you for writing and for your strong support for the welfare of animals. If you or your staff wish to discuss this matter further, please contact Mr. Christopher Needham, our Agency's Legislative Director, at (202) 799-7027 or at Christopher.M.Needham@usda.gov. A similar letter is being sent to your colleagues.

Sincerely,

*Kevin Shea*

Kevin Shea  
Administrator  
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service