

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 7, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We write to thank you for your leadership at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to support agricultural producers, including specialty crop producers, who are struggling to keep their operations afloat during the COVID-19 emergency. As you work to implement provisions in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, we respectfully request that you provide direct support to the specialty crop producers across our nation who are facing immediate and substantial financial challenges. Such relief will not only assist producers who are struggling to make ends meet during this unprecedented time but also help ensure our most vulnerable communities continue to have access to fresh produce.

As you know, the CARES Act includes \$14 billion for the replenishment of the Commodity Credit Corporation and an additional \$9.5 billion for agricultural producers impacted by COVID-19, including specialty crop producers, producers that supply local food systems, and livestock producers. We are very pleased that specialty crop producers have been specifically included in this relief package. These producers are experiencing significant losses, with more losses expected in the coming days, weeks, and potentially months. Now, as you make decisions regarding how best to allocate CARES Act funding, we request that you reserve funding to develop and execute a recovery and relief plan for the specialty crop industry. We ask that this plan include three key components, outlined below.

1. **Fresh Produce Purchases:** We ask that this plan include funding and guidance for USDA purchases of fresh fruits and vegetables, including purchases for federal nutrition programs. We are aware that USDA is working with schools across the country to ensure the continuity of school meal service during school closures. Nevertheless, large volumes of product previously contracted to schools are being left unsold. We ask that USDA take over these contracts in the short-term to provide much-needed certainty to specialty crop producers and children who rely on school meals. With a steep decline in purchases in the food service sector, we also ask USDA to swiftly develop a purchase program, in addition to the existing

purchase programs, that would quickly provide stability to all impacted fresh produce growers through the duration of the COVID-19 public health emergency.

2. **Direct Payments to Specialty Crop Producers:** We request USDA provide direct payments to specialty crop producers impacted by lost sales or other financial losses due to the COVID-19 emergency. In 2019, USDA provided direct payments through the Market Facilitation Program to farmers impacted by market losses due to trade volatility. Today, specialty crop producers who rely on the food service industry are experiencing similar challenges with respect to lost markets. Any USDA effort to provide direct payments to farmers as part of its pandemic relief programming should therefore include the fruit and vegetable sector.
3. **Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act:** We request that USDA's plan consider the reality that, throughout this pandemic, growers and shippers may struggle to meet contractual obligations under the Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act (PACA). We ask that USDA provide assistance and flexibility in light of the unprecedented consequences of COVID-19.

As this global crisis continues to evolve, we recognize that additional programs and flexibilities may need to be considered and implemented to keep fresh produce moving through the food supply chain. We hope that you will use all resources at USDA's discretion, including funding from the CARES Act and carryover funding from the previous fiscal year, to address the immediate needs of the specialty crop industry.

Thank you once again for your stalwart commitment to our nation's fresh produce farmers. We appreciate your attention to their needs and are happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress



Fred Upton
Member of Congress



Jim Costa
Member of Congress



Doug LaMalfa
Member of Congress

Henry Cuellar
Member of Congress

Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress

Mario Diaz Balart
Member of Congress

Mike Simpson
Member of Congress

Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress

Jeff Duncan
Member of Congress

TJ Cox
Member of Congress

Scott Tipton
Member of Congress

Sean Patrick Maloney
Member of Congress

Greg Steube
Member of Congress

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

Bill Huizenga
Member of Congress

Salud Carbajal
Member of Congress

John Rutherford
Member of Congress

Vicente Gonzalez
Member of Congress

Jack Bergman
Member of Congress

Debbie Mucarsel-Powell
Member of Congress

Austin Scott
Member of Congress

David Scott
Member of Congress

Russ Fulcher
Member of Congress

Anthony Brindisi
Member of Congress

Ben Cline
Member of Congress

Juan Vargas
Member of Congress

Denver Riggleman
Member of Congress

Josh Harder
Member of Congress

John Moolenaar
Member of Congress

Jerry McNerney
Member of Congress

Bill Posey
Member of Congress

Suzan DelBene
Member of Congress

Neal Dunn
Member of Congress

Collin C. Peterson
Member of Congress

Elise Stefanik
Member of Congress

Kurt Schrader
Member of Congress

Rick Allen
Member of Congress

Stephanie Murphy
Member of Congress

John Joyce, M.D.
Member of Congress

Al Lawson
Member of Congress

Mike Bost
Member of Congress

Ami Bera
Member of Congress

Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Member of Congress

Mike Thompson
Member of Congress

Doug Lamborn
Member of Congress

Stacey E. Plaskett
Member of Congress

Glenn 'GT' Thompson
Member of Congress

Kim Schrier
Member of Congress

David Rouzer
Member of Congress

Julia Brownley
Member of Congress

Jenniffer González Colón
Member of Congress

Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress

Will Hurd
Member of Congress

Peter Welch
Member of Congress

Jaime Herrera Beutler
Member of Congress

Antonio Delgado
Member of Congress

Scott Perry
Member of Congress

Jared Huffman
Member of Congress

Brian Fitzpatrick
Member of Congress

Xochitl Torres Small
Member of Congress

Ted S. Yoho, D.V.M.
Member of Congress

Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress

Earl L. 'Buddy' Carter
Member of Congress

Joe Courtney
Member of Congress

Gregory F. Murphy, M.D.
Member of Congress

Alcee E. Hastings
Member of Congress

Rodney Davis
Member of Congress

John Garamendi
Member of Congress

Ross Spano
Member of Congress

Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress

Jefferson Van Drew
Member of Congress

Chrissy Houlahan
Member of Congress

John Shimkus
Member of Congress

Cheri Bustos
Member of Congress

Fred Keller
Member of Congress

Tulsi Gabbard
Member of Congress

Rick Crawford
Member of Congress

Doris Matsui
Member of Congress

Jared Golden
Member of Congress

Mark Pocan
Member of Congress

Filemon Vela
Member of Congress

Peter DeFazio
Member of Congress

Josh Gottheimer
Member of Congress

Val Demings
Member of Congress

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

Marcia Fudge
Member of Congress

Tony Cárdenas
Member of Congress

Tom Malinowski
Member of Congress

Rick Larsen
Member of Congress

Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress

Ann McLane Kuster
Member of Congress

Darren Soto
Member of Congress

Derek Kilmer
Member of Congress

Raul Ruiz, M.D.
Member of Congress

Emanuel Cleaver, II
Member of Congress

Jennifer Wexton
Member of Congress

Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress

Eric Swalwell
Member of Congress

Brenda Lawrence
Member of Congress

Alma S. Adams, Ph.D.
Member of Congress

Cedric L. Richmond
Member of Congress

Jason Crow
Member of Congress

Brian Higgins
Member of Congress

Ann Kirkpatrick
Member of Congress

Daniel T. Kildee
Member of Congress

Elissa Slotkin
Member of Congress

Betty McCollum
Member of Congress