

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

April 20, 2020

Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue,

After learning of initial details released by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) on the administration of agricultural assistance funding provided by Congress in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) and the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, we write to reiterate priorities for implementation that reflect the needs of Maine farmers and families. The Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) must provide expeditious assistance directly to growers, in addition to ensuring that local producers and their supply chains are able to help keep Americans fed during this trying time.

The shutdown of the food service network – including restaurants, schools, and hospitality businesses – has caused enormous economic harm to Maine's small- and medium-sized farms, especially for dairy farmers and for growers of specialty crops such as potatoes, blueberries, and apples. As the Maine congressional delegation outlined in a recent letter to you, potato growers in our state have been unable to sell a surplus from last year that is equivalent to more than 12 percent of Maine's total annual crop (and a value of more than \$22 million). As such, we urge the Department to provide targeted farmer payments, which are essential for Maine's specialty crop growers who have suffered acutely from recent international trade disputes and received almost zero direct benefit from the Administration's multiple disbursements of agricultural aid.

Also integral to the stabilization of specialty crops and other struggling agricultural sectors are the components of the CFAP that will focus on purchasing fresh fruits and vegetables, dairy products, and meat products for redistribution to food banks, school nutrition programs, and emergency feeding organizations. As Maine and other states across the country continue to experience rising food insecurity, we urge the Department to quickly implement this program in a manner that feeds families and supports our local producers by reducing inventory and stabilizing prices. CFAP could also have a positive impact on the currently slowed food service distribution industry, and we urge the USDA to collaborate with Maine's invaluable anti-hunger organizations and distribution companies to implement this program.

In administering the purchase and distribution pieces of the CFAP, USDA must also allow broad flexibility on the types and quantities of products deemed eligible. Under normal circumstances, for example, dairy products such as whole milk, butter, cottage cheese, and

yogurts might not be allowed in USDA nutrition assistance programs. Given the severity of the current circumstances in regard to increased hunger and excess supply, we expect USDA to incorporate these dairy and other agricultural products that might not typically be available through the agency's nutrition assistance programming.

Our farmers are essential and are the backbone of the economy of many rural communities. USDA must work quickly and collaboratively to ensure that small- and medium-sized farms are able to survive this unexpected downturn while helping to meet the food security needs of American families.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress

cc: Greg Ibach, Under Secretary of Agriculture for Marketing and Regulatory Programs