

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 2, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave. S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue,

We are writing to ensure that farmers who have lost direct markets due to the COVID-19 pandemic are specifically included in any relief, including direct assistance, provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Farmers and ranchers from across the agricultural spectrum have suffered deep losses and future contracts as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The local and regional food economy has seen tremendous growth in the last decade. According to USDA, direct-to-consumer food sales in the U.S. totaled \$2.8 billion in 2017. Whether it's direct to consumer, direct to retail, or direct to institution, these marketing channels have created important economic opportunities for farmers in our districts. Such opportunities have helped to keep farmers profitable, and have empowered consumers to learn more about where their food comes from. Unfortunately, farmers who sell products at the local and regional level are suffering significant market losses due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A recent report estimated a decline in sales of more than \$680 million across key local and regional markets due to COVID-19 from March to May 2020. Many farmers can no longer sell products at farmers' markets or to institutions, such as schools or universities, due to closures related to COVID-19. Many farms are dealing with unexpected expenses just to stay in business, including infrastructure investments related to delivery or sanitation improvements that are necessary due to COVID-19.

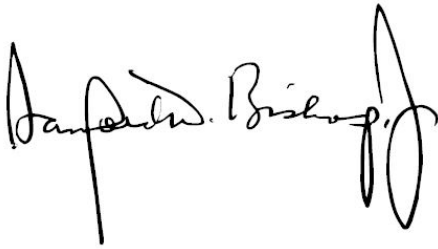
In addition to the financial damage to the local and regional food economies, various farming and ranching communities across the Nation are selling their product at a financial loss. For example, cattle producers are experiencing an unprecedented collapse in prices that prevents many of these ranchers from recouping the cost of production. The economic outlook for dairy farmers has also grown darker in a number of regions across the country as milk prices continue to decline. All of these producers, many of which are small in size, need to continue selling their safe, affordable, and nutritious foods in the marketplace.

As you know, Congress recently passed the Senate Amendment to H.R. 748,- The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, which provides \$9.5 billion in support for “agricultural producers impacted by coronavirus, including producers of specialty crops, producers that supply local food systems, including farmers markets, restaurants, and schools, and livestock producers, including dairy producers.” We are very pleased that local food producers are specifically included in this relief.

As you work to swiftly implement this provision of CARES Act, we urge you to make sure that farmers who have lost direct markets as well as those farmers and ranchers losing income receive their fair share of any relief, especially direct assistance, provided by USDA. Farmers engaged in the local and regional food economy and the various farmers and ranchers of all types of foods are in dire need of immediate assistance. Maintaining the diversity of American agriculture helps us all to prosper, and strengthens our reputation as an agricultural world leader, so we cannot leave any farmers behind.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter, and we look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,



Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.
Member of Congress



Jeff Fortenberry
Member of Congress



Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress



Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress

The following Members of Congress have co-signed this letter:

Mark Pocan	Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Tulsi Gabbard	Brian Higgins
James P. McGovern	Angie Craig
Earl Blumenauer	Chuck Fleischmann
Kim Schrier, M.D.	John Katko
Antonio Delgado	Collin C. Peterson
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