

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 13, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue,

We write regarding the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) and several opportunities to improve the reach of this program. While we appreciate USDA's efforts to provide relief to American farmers during this time of supply chain disruptions, lost markets, and uncertainty, we remain concerned that the structure of CFAP payments has made direct assistance largely inaccessible to smaller, more diversified farms, including many beginning and underserved producers, who rely on local market outlets and direct-to-consumer sales. We urge USDA to accommodate the structure of the program to ensure that these producers can have equitable access to this much-needed assistance.

In the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, Congress provided \$9.5 billion for direct producer assistance. Recognizing that farmers who sell directly to consumers or to now-shuttered institutions would be disproportionately harmed by the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress specifically directed USDA to provide relief to "producers that supply local food systems, including farmers markets, restaurants, and schools." Despite this, USDA did not provide any specific accommodation for these producers in the design of CFAP payments. Indeed, the program's rules have meant many of these farms are struggling to access relief or are entirely ineligible for assistance through this program.

In order to address these concerns, we request that USDA make the following modifications to the CFAP program:

1. Payments based on whole-farm revenue losses: Basing payments on price losses for a limited list of individual commodities does not fully capture the harm many local food producers have experienced due to COVID-19, including the significant costs of adapting to alternative marketing channels. Further, the "one size fits all" prices calculated by USDA do not reflect the premium prices that these farmers would typically receive for their products. To remedy this, USDA should create a mechanism for small and local food producers to receive a payment based on their overall revenue losses.
2. Flexibility on documentation: Local food producers who must compile records for multiple different commodities and types of markets are currently at a serious disadvantage in accessing payments, particularly if they do not have an existing relationship with the Farm Service Agency (FSA). USDA should allow greater flexibility

in paperwork requirements to account for differences in record-keeping across different types of producers.

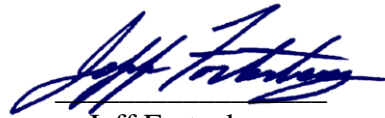
3. Extending eligibility to additional commodities: Many local food producers, particularly those who grow specialty crops, are currently ineligible for CFAP payments because they produce commodities that USDA determined did not experience qualifying price losses within a narrow window of time. While we recognize USDA's efforts to allow previously excluded commodities to apply for inclusion through the Notice of Financial Assistance (NOFA) process and appreciate the new commodities included as a result, we remain concerned that many producers who have experienced significant harm continue to be shut out.

Thank you for consideration of these requests, and we look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure that local food producers receive the help they need to weather this crisis.

Sincerely,



Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress



Jeff Fortenberry
Member of Congress