

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 30, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Perdue,

We write to follow up on our April 9, 2020 letter regarding U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) relief for local food producers, and to urge USDA to incorporate provisions specific to local food producers as the Agency finalizes the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP). Specifically, we urge USDA to provide support for local food producers by: 1) adjusting the CFAP payment calculations to better reflect the business models of local producers; 2) amending the covered time period to more appropriately reflect when local producers experienced losses; and 3) developing an inclusive outreach plan to ensure all local food producers – including those with limited internet access and those for whom English is not their first language – are aware of the benefits available to them under the CFAP.

On April 17, 2020, USDA announced the new CFAP, which will provide a total of \$19 billion in COVID-19 relief provided by the *Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act*, including \$16 billion for direct assistance to producers and \$3 billion for commodity purchases and food distribution. While USDA mentioned that the direct producer assistance program would be made available to producers of all sizes – including local producers, as required by the CARES Act – we are disappointed that there were no specific details on how this assistance will be tailored to the unique challenges that local producers face, or how the Department will conduct outreach to beginning and underserved farmers.

Many local food producers sell a wide variety of crops, specialty crops, and livestock to a variety of local and regional markets. Often, specific records of sales are generalized into broad categories such as produce or livestock but not broken into specific sales by commodity. For example, these producers may have \$100,000 in produce sales a year but may not be able to distinguish how much of a specific type of produce is sold at a farmers market versus directly to a restaurant or school. This type of commerce makes it extremely difficult for local food producers to participate in a generic “one size fits all” direct assistance program.

Given this complexity, we recommend that USDA calculate payments based on total farm revenue and consider price premiums for diversified producers, organics, and value-added producers. We also recommend implementation of flexible paperwork requirements that allow more producers to participate in the program and account for different types of record keeping that may be used to sell into local markets.

During USDA's public announcement, it was suggested that the direct producer assistance would cover up to 85 percent of losses incurred between January and April 15, 2020 and cover up to 30 percent of losses incurred after April 15, 2020. Many producers selling directly to restaurants or schools did not see an economic impact of the COVID-19 disaster until states began issuing stay at home orders and closed non-essential businesses. This occurred in most places starting in mid-March and could continue for several months into the future. We recommend USDA adjust the window of 85 percent coverage to reflect the time period during which farmers have experienced – and continue to experience – significant losses and additional costs as a result of widespread closure of businesses and institutions during the COVID-19 disaster.

In addition, USDA has not provided information on how it will conduct outreach to ensure the participation of beginning, underserved, and local food producers in the direct producer assistance program. Some of these producers already face existing barriers to entry including limited access to internet, English as a second language, and limited technical skills. We recommend USDA develop a thorough outreach plan that provides technical assistance and ensures these producers are able to participate in the direct to producer assistance program.

On top of these existing challenges, local food producers are in the middle of high planting season and many do not have existing relationships with USDA. These producers may struggle to learn a new federal program in time to participate before funding runs out so we request that USDA track farmer program participation and require receipt for service at local Farm Service Agency offices.

While we appreciate USDA's efforts to implement the CFAP with local food producers in mind, we encourage you to incorporate these recommendations as you finalize the CFAP program to ensure local producers are able to participate. By adjusting the mechanism USDA uses to calculate CFAP payments for local food producers, changing the covered time period to reflect those losses experienced after April 15, 2020, and implementing an outreach plan to reach all local food producers, including new farmers, we can help minimize the significant burden COVID-19 has placed on our local producers.

Thank you for quickly implementing the CFAP; we appreciate your attention to the specific needs and serious challenges faced by local food producers and look forward to working with you on additional targeted relief efforts.

Sincerely,

/s/ Sherrod Brown  
Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator

/s/ Susan M. Collins  
Susan Collins  
United States Senator

/s/ Debbie Stabenow  
Debbie Stabenow  
United States Senator

/s/ Jeffrey A. Merkley  
Lisa Murkowski  
United States Senator

/s/ Robert Menendez  
Robert Menendez  
United States Senator

/s/ Bernard Sanders  
Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator

/s/ Tina Smith  
Tina Smith  
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen  
Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator

/s/ Mazie K. Hirono  
Mazie K. Hirono  
United States Senator

/s/ Jack Reed  
Jack Reed  
United States Senator

/s/ Angus S. King, Jr.  
Angus S. King, Jr.  
United States Senator

/s/ Ron Wyden  
Ron Wyden  
United States Senator

/s/ Christopher S. Murphy  
Christopher S. Murphy  
United States Senator

/s/ Patty Murray  
Patty Murray  
United States Senator

/s/ Cory A. Booker  
Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator

/s/ Tammy Baldwin  
Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator

/s/ Kirsten Gillibrand  
Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator

/s/ Amy Klobuchar  
Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator

/s/ Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
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United States Senator

/s/ Tammy Duckworth  
Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator

/s/ Joe Manchin III  
Joe Manchin III  
United States Senator

/s/ Sheldon Whitehouse  
Sheldon Whitehouse  
United States Senator

/s/ Mark R. Warner  
Mark R. Warner  
United States Senator

/s/ Richard Blumenthal  
Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator

/s/ Patrick Leahy  
Patrick Leahy  
United States Senator

/s/ Tim Kaine  
Tim Kaine  
United States Senator

/s/ Brian Schatz  
Brian Schatz  
United States Senator