

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 13, 2020

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

Secretary Perdue,

Thank you for your leadership and attention to the United States food and agriculture sector in this time of crisis. Continuing to supply Americans with food is essential for health and wellness as we battle the current COVID-19 outbreak, and we are grateful for all of your efforts.

As you begin administering the agriculture provisions included in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, we urge that your attention and the CARES Act relief initially target those growers facing severe financial distress and immediate economic collapse such as the specialty crop growers who count on a majority of their business supplying restaurants, hotels, and other foodservice outlets, which have been shuttered by government-mandated orders.

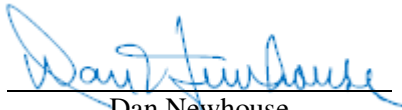
We strongly urge your initial support to be focused on those growers currently facing significant hardship and consider the impact of the current outbreak on demand and prices for a number of these agriculture commodities. Given the catastrophic drop in demand for certain products, many growers are being asked to cut production well below recent purchase commitments and historical production levels. In many cases, growers have already purchased inputs, prepped the ground, and in some cases, planted crops (thousands of dollars per acre) that suddenly no longer have a market. In other instances, growers who have stored their perishable 2019 crop are in jeopardy of losing tens of millions of dollars because food service and institutional demand is nonexistent for the foreseeable future.

As you develop the structure of USDA's support for growers, it is imperative that consideration be given to the historical production of key commodities and that your support programs take into consideration these immediate cuts in contract purchases that cause the harshest market impact. The CARES Act relief should take into account these abrupt market changes caused by the government-mandated closure of foodservice and institutions.

When disasters have struck suddenly, past emergency assistance has pivoted on historical production levels. We recommend a similar approach now. Moreover, many of these crops hurt directly by stay-in-place directives are not traditionally covered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) suite of safety net programs. These growers are unfamiliar with the FSA disaster protocol. Additionally, We trust you will incorporate reasonable adjusted gross income (AGI) and payment limit parameters that reflect previous Congressional and Administrative actions in times of disaster and other significant market challenges. For example, under the USDA WHIP disaster program, AGI limits have been waived if at least 75% of average AGI is derived from farming, ranching, or forestry-related activities. Similar accommodations were made for growers under USDA's 2019 Market Facilitation Program (MFP).

Secretary Perdue, we commend you for the tireless focus that you and the entire Department have placed on ensuring the U.S. food supply is sound and moving forward. We can't overstate the importance of that to the health and safety of U.S. consumers and the entire agriculture and food value chain. Thank you for your consideration of the points highlighted in this letter. We stand ready to work with you to ensure the distribution of the funds provided by Congress in the CARES Act is appropriately targeted to the sectors of the industry most in need at this time.

Sincerely



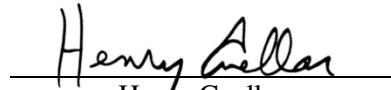
Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress



Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress



Fred Upton
Member of Congress



Henry Cuellar
Member of Congress