

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 3, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 205010

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We write to ask that you take action to ensure the continuity of our country's food supply and support rural areas during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic by providing needed relief to farmers—including by ensuring that the temporary flexibilities on farm loans recently announced by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) are made permanent for the duration of the pandemic and subsequent economic recovery, and also by ensuring adequate and equitable access to credit during this period of market uncertainty.

As you know, farmers across the country have faced many challenges in the past several years. The coronavirus pandemic is now causing additional disruptions, driving further declines in market conditions, prices, and export demand, and some experts believe that the consequences of the pandemic could hit rural communities particularly hard. In the past week alone, cattle producers have seen excessive price losses and corn growers have seen biofuel producers suspend purchases due to weaker fuel demand. These conditions have created cash flow challenges as spring planting season quickly approaches.

Americans always depend on our nation's farmers to grow the food, fuel, and fiber that we all need, but that reliance becomes much more pronounced in times of crisis. We appreciate the Department's recognition of the challenges facing farmers and the announcement made by FSA on March 26, 2020, to provide flexibility for those repaying farm loans. These actions will help alleviate cash flow concerns as producers make important business decisions for their operations. We respectfully ask that you provide us with additional information as to how the Department plans to communicate these flexibilities to producers, the criteria that the Department will consider when determining whether a producer receives temporary payment deferral or forbearance, and how long these extensions will be in effect for producers responding to loan servicing actions.

To provide additional support for those whose operations are being affected by the coronavirus, we urge you to consider making emergency measures such as deadline extensions, loan payment deferrals, payment forbearance, and a full suspension of all current and pending foreclosure actions effective for the duration of the pandemic and subsequent economic recovery. The Department should also consider taking additional emergency actions – including the authorization of loan restructuring and loan balance write-downs – that were not included in the March 26 announcement. Such measures are critical to avoiding disruption in the country's food supply chain.

We also urge you to prioritize and fully leverage existing programs at the Department that are well suited to resolving loan and credit impacts as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the Agricultural Mediation Program. This existing federal-state partnership has a proven track record of providing confidential and neutral forums to discuss and resolve loan and credit issues between farmers and their lenders. The program's caseloads have steadily risen over the past eight years and can be expected to increase as the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic ripple through the rural economy.

We will continue working to provide for additional support for farmers and rural communities to address the ongoing effects of the coronavirus pandemic. In the meantime, we urge you to consider actions that will provide flexibility and temporary relief for borrowers and ensure adequate and equitable access to credit.

Thank you for your continued work on behalf of American farmers and ranchers. We stand ready and willing to work with you to help get farmers through these extraordinary circumstances.

Sincerely,

/s/ Amy Klobuchar
Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

/s/ John Hoeven
John Hoeven
United States Senator

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

/s/ John Thune
John Thune
United States Senator

/s/ Debbie Stabenow
Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator

/s/ Steve Daines
Steve Daines
United States Senator

/s/ Richard J. Durbin
Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

/s/ John Barrasso, M.D.
John Barrasso, M.D.
United States Senator

/s/ Kirsten Gillibrand
Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

/s/ Cindy Hyde-Smith
Cindy Hyde-Smith
United States Senator

/s/ Tina Smith
Tina Smith
United States Senator

/s/ John Boozman
John Boozman
United States Senator

/s/ Michael F. Bennet
Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator

/s/ M. Michael Rounds
M. Michael Rounds
United States Senator

/s/ Doug Jones
Doug Jones
United States Senator

/s/ Deb Fischer
Deb Fischer
United States Senator

/s/ Tammy Duckworth
Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator

/s/ Thom Tillis
Thom Tillis
United States Senator

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

/s/ Todd Young
Todd Young
United States Senator

/s/ Kyrsten Sinema
Kyrsten Sinema
United States Senator

/s/ Jerry Moran
Jerry Moran
United States Senator

/s/ Patty Murray
Patty Murray
United States Senator

/s/ Kevin Cramer
Kevin Cramer
United States Senator

/s/ Tammy Baldwin
Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

/s/ Michael B. Enzi
Michael B. Enzi
United States Senator

/s/ Thomas R. Carper
Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator

/s/ Tom Cotton
Tom Cotton
United States Senator

/s/ Gary C. Peters
Gary C. Peters
United States Senator

/s/ Bill Cassidy, M.D.
Bill Cassidy, M.D.
United States Senator

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

/s/ Cory Gardner
Cory Gardner
United States Senator

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

/s/ James M. Inhofe
James M. Inhofe
United States Senator

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

/s/ Martha McSally
Martha McSally
United States Senator

/s/ Ron Wyden
Ron Wyden
United States Senator

/s/ Josh Hawley
Josh Hawley
United States Senator

/s/ Brian Schatz
Brian Schatz
United States Senator

/s/ John Cornyn
John Cornyn
United States Senator

/s/ Jeanne Shaheen
Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

/s/ Jon Tester
Jon Tester
United States Senator