



State of Wisconsin
Governor Tony Evers

Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection

April 20, 2020

Secretary Sonny Perdue
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

On behalf of Wisconsin's diverse agriculture community, I write today to express appreciation for the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP). This federal assistance is a welcome step for the farmers, ranchers, processors, and retailers who are struggling with the impact of COVID-19. I also write to ask that you make specific details of the delivery mechanism for programs and the direct payments to farmers available as soon as possible.

As I referenced in my April 1st letter to you, COVID-19 has posed unprecedented challenges for Wisconsin agricultural producers and agri-businesses. The Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) has been successfully connecting our industry representatives since March to find a home for our high-quality Wisconsin products. We developed partnerships throughout our state's food distribution networks to move Wisconsin products to the food insecure, resulting in the purchase of thousands of gallons of milk and the donation of over a million pounds of cheese. I am pleased that USDA has followed up on our request to keep the food supply chain moving by purchasing surplus commodities for redistribution.

The direct payments to farmers for losses associated with the disruption of the food supply chain is also welcome news. It was valuable to hear on today's conference call that the program is inclusive and applies regardless of size of operation. You referenced rulemaking that must occur before checks can be distributed by the end of May. I urge you to do whatever you can to expedite that timeline. Time is of the essence: spring is here, and farmers are in the fields. They need capital and support programs now. The sooner your agency provides details to states on the logistics of CFAP and gets the funding in the hands of farmers, the better.

Although we are certainly making progress, there is an opportunity to do more. As you work to implement these food purchases and direct payments, I encourage you to listen to Wisconsin's dairy producers, who have recommended using the Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC) program as a mechanism to address price volatility in their sector. I ask you to re-open this program, and embrace the opportunity to require farmers to lock in for a number of years so they can have additional protections, now and into the future. No one could have predicted a global pandemic when the initial sign-up period closed in the fall. Given the impacts of COVID-19, I urge you to re-open this program now.

The difficulties our farmers are facing will not end here. COVID-19 will have lasting effects on our state's agricultural economy. To fully address those impacts, more resources and greater flexibility will be needed. I urge you to support the Food and Agriculture Block Grants to States proposal authored by U.S. Senator Tammy

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Baldwin. This proposal offers states additional resources and flexibility to address both direct and indirect impacts to agriculture on the ground in their states, providing them the ability to manage programs that address their specific needs.

These are challenging times for all of us, but especially for the people who grow, process, and distribute our food. They depend on us to help develop and support creative solutions to the obstacles COVID-19 has presented. Now is the time for us to continue to work together; think broadly; and bring the full weight, resources, and flexibility of the federal government to the table.

Thank you for the information you have shared about the USDA's plans to purchase commodities for distribution and for directing payments to farmers in need. I look forward to seeing the full details of CFAP and working with USDA to expedite these systems now, as well as cooperating on additional steps to keep our food supply chain flowing.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Randy Romanski". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Randy Romanski
Interim Secretary
Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP)