

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 23, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We write to thank you for your leadership at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to ensure that fresh produce currently in the supply chain is making its way to those who need it most as a result of the Proclamation on Declaring a National Emergency Concerning the Novel Coronavirus Disease Outbreak. As you work to continue mitigating the impacts of this emergency on our nation's agriculture industry, we ask that you include targeted relief for the specialty crop industry. Such relief will not only help producers who are facing significant financial challenges but also support efforts to provide food and nutrition assistance to the most vulnerable members of our communities.

The novel coronavirus outbreak presents an unprecedented threat to the fresh fruit and vegetable industries. As growers, processors, and shippers work to keep safe, healthy product moving through the supply chain, we urge you to provide both regulatory flexibility and direct support to the specialty crop industry. Specifically, we request regulatory flexibility to implement the Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act under the circumstances of this emergency; a commitment from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables for federal nutrition programs; and direct support to specialty crop producers whose customers are now unable to fulfill their previous purchase commitments due to the current crisis.

We are also aware that the specialty crop industry has provided USDA with a recovery and stability plan in response to the novel coronavirus emergency. We believe USDA has the capacity and resolve to swiftly implement this plan, which would provide support to produce companies facing immediate economic risks and longer-term stability to the fruit and vegetable supply chain. By implementing this plan, USDA would not only be providing critical relief to growers; it would also help reassure American families that the food they need will be available throughout this crisis and beyond.

Thank you for your commitment to specialty crop producers during this emergency. Going forward, we encourage you to act with flexibility and speed as you take these requests into consideration. We also urge you to maximize USDA's ability to provide immediate relief to the specialty crop industry by using all resources at your discretion, including carryover funds from the previous fiscal year.

Sincerely,

Jimmy Panetta
Dan Newhouse
Jim Costa