

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

July 31, 2020

The Honorable George Ervin “Sonny” Perdue III  
Secretary of Agriculture  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We write out of concern for the Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) proposed changes to the Farmers to Families Food Box Program and to urge you to stop implementation until the Department appropriately seeks public input on how these changes will impact farmers and families who access the program. Until then, USDA should continue to award contracts to farmers based on their performance in prior rounds of the program.

On Friday, July 24, USDA announced new restrictions that will dramatically impact which farmers can continue to participate in the third round of the Farmers to Families Food Box Program. Specifically, USDA now plans to only award contracts to farmers who can supply ‘combination boxes,’ where each box includes specific minimum requirements of produce, dairy products, meat products, and fluid milk. Previously, farmers were eligible to receive contracts for ‘single-item boxes’ which contained product of only one of the four food categories.

Given the complexities and skillsets required for different areas of agriculture and farming, farmers today typically specialize in specific areas of production. Indeed, we have heard from farmers across the nation who are slated to be ineligible for future contracts because they do not produce product from all four food categories on their farms. Moreover, the logistical obstacles associated with identifying individual subcontractors for other food categories is impractical for many farmers and renders that alternative nearly impossible.

While we appreciate USDA’s effort to combat hunger during the COVID-19 pandemic, we are concerned by the potential impact these new restrictions will have on farmers, families, and local food systems. Limiting eligibility strictly to entities with the ability to procure all the required food categories will likely have implications on program costs and access, which must be fully understood before moving forward. Moreover, we are concerned these proposed changes move the program dangerously close to the Administration’s flawed ‘Harvest Box’ proposal, which faced bipartisan opposition and never received Congressional authorization.

We remain committed to working with you to ensure our nation’s farmers, as well as the families who rely on their harvest, are supported through this challenging time.

Sincerely,



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ROSA L. DeLAURO  
Member of Congress



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MARCIA L. FUDGE  
Member of Congress



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CHERI BUSTOS  
Member of Congress