

Congress of the United States
Washington, D.C. 20515

February 02, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden:

We write today to express our concern with the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) suspension of the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) Additional Assistance and to urge the immediate resumption of processing and issuing of payments to program participants.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the CFAP program has played an important role in stabilizing critical supply chain continuity, protecting national food security, and ensuring access to food assistance as unemployment rates skyrocketed. Additionally, CFAP has been a critical tool in shoring up a beleaguered agricultural economy made up primarily of small business family farms unprepared to face the unprecedented challenges of the past year.


As the nation spent the past 11 months grappling with the implications of the global pandemic, America's agricultural producers have been among the hardest hit segments of the economy. Supply chain interruptions across the country caused by economic lockdowns and outbreaks of infection led to significant disruptions of agricultural markets and processing capabilities. These impacts were most apparent in the travel restrictions that dropped the bottom out of food demand from the hospitality industry and viral outbreaks that shuttered meat, dairy, and produce processing facilities.

Agriculture and food production is an industry that requires a months-long production lead and adheres strictly to a "just in time" processing model. In this environment, even small or abbreviated deviations in processing capabilities can be significantly disruptive. Unfortunately, the several weeks of disruptions at the beginning of the pandemic were devastating to the industry. The extensive oversupply that resulted – particularly of pork, dairy, and root vegetables – led to vast destruction of otherwise good, high quality food goods with no place to go, and at a tremendous cost the farmers that produced them; mostly under contract.


The culling of livestock populations and the dumping of milk or rapid disposal of produce has and assuredly will create a far-reaching cyclical impact on the agricultural economy and the overall viability of the American family farm – a problem agricultural leaders will likely spend a decade trying to correct. The CFAP 2 Additional Assistance program is a crucial step in proactively correcting these impacts by finally providing assistance to contract producers – some of the hardest hit in agriculture.

While we understand the desire of a new administration to review rulemakings underway before continuing, we do not see fit to suspend such an important and timely program – necessary for stabilizing critical infrastructure – during a national emergency. We see no need to freeze the processing of applications or payments for CFAP or any of its related programs as it goes through regulatory review, and we therefore respectfully request that your administration and the USDA resume processing and payments immediately.

Sincerely,

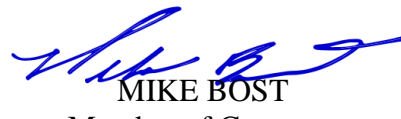

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CC: Office of the Secretary,
United States Department of Agriculture