



April 30, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We represent the next generation of farmers and ranchers in the United States. Our Coalition, the National Young Farmers Coalition, is celebrating its 10th year advocating for a bright and just future for agriculture. We believe our nation's young farmers, who will feed our country for decades to come, should have a seat at the table for decisions that affect their future. We invite you to join our farmers for a virtual roundtable to hear from them directly on what they need to survive this crisis.

COVID-19 is a threat to all those involved in agriculture, but our nation's young farmers are particularly vulnerable. Their farm businesses, already in a precarious position in early years, are struggling with lost markets - 75% of farmers in our recent survey are experiencing lost sales due to reduced outlets to sell their products. Declining restaurant sales, farmers market closures, and market uncertainty threatens the success of their season. In addition to lost markets, they are incurring added costs of pivoting to alternative sales strategies, dealing with disruption to planned infrastructure projects, working around a lack of available support resources for their business (such as veterinarian and mechanics), and taking on unanticipated caretaking responsibilities. As you know, farming communities already shoulder a lot of risk. **If we don't lend a helping hand to our nation's young farmers, they will not survive this season and we will have lost another generation of farmers.**

But our nation's young farmers aren't holding their hands out for help - in this moment of crisis they are showing the innovation of our nation's farming community. These farmers and ranchers are responding to the emergency need for safe food by supplying much needed produce, meat, eggs, dairy, and grains to their communities. They are keeping our food banks stocked with produce, expanding their offerings for community supported agriculture, piloting online farmers markets and farm stores, and working overtime to ensure our communities have the healthy

NATIONAL YOUNG FARMERS COALITION

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food they need to survive this crisis. They are more than holding up their commitment to feed our country. Their service is essential.

We were thrilled to see Congress include funding for farmers, including those who supply local food systems, in the CARES Act. And we are grateful for your swift action to implement the CARES Act and provide much needed support to our nation's farmers. **We're concerned, however, that our nation's young farmers will be left out of the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) if the application does not have their situations in mind.**

- Many of our farmers sell a wide variety of crops, specialty crops, and livestock to a variety of local and regional markets. Commodity price loss does not represent their losses. They need payments based on total farm revenue with local and Organic market premiums taken into account.
- Many did not see an economic impact of the COVID-19 disaster until states began issuing stay at home orders and closed non-essential businesses. This occurred in most places starting in mid-March and could continue for several months into the future. Relief dollars should focus on the time period with the most economic impact.
- Many of our farmers do not have familiarity with USDA programs and will require outreach and technical assistance.
- Set-asides for and specific outreach to beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers, including farmers of color, would ensure that they are able to access funds along with more experienced and well-resourced farmers.

We know that USDA has never been busier meeting the needs of America's farmers. We simply ask you to take the time to talk to young farmers, hear their stories of how COVID is impacting their businesses, and consider their needs in implementation of the CFAP. **We invite you to join a small group of the country's best and brightest young farmers for a virtual roundtable at your convenience.**

Sincerely,



Sophie Ackoff
Co-Executive Director
National Young Farmers Coalition



Martin Lemos
Co-Executive Director
National Young Farmers Coalition