



April 10, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Mr. Secretary:

The American Farm Bureau Federation and Feeding America applaud the leadership you and the Department are demonstrating as the nation responds to the COVID emergency. In that context, we are writing to recommend additional steps to ensure food banks across America are stocked, and farmers and ranchers can expand existing partnerships with food banks to respond to shifting demands and urgent needs during this crisis.

As you are aware, food banks are under tremendous pressure to meet the skyrocketing demand. Press reports underscore the massive surge in need, with some food banks seeing as much as 100 percent increases in demand. In some states, the National Guard has been called upon to help package goods for distribution to customers. At the same time, however, we are seeing literally tons of agricultural goods being discarded because of the shutdown of so much of the economy. Paradoxically, we are seeing a simultaneous surge in demand at a moment when many farmers are being told there is an oversupply of their product. The unfortunate consequences include public panic about an adequate food supply and plunging prices for farm produce.

We are writing you to ask USDA to expand on your partnership with us in executing the solution. The Department has the opportunity to help address both unfortunate consequences described above through a voucher program that would deepen the relationships between farmers and food banks, allowing them to work directly with one another instead of relying upon third parties and what is sometimes a longer pathway to get food from farms to food bank shelves. We recognize that regulatory flexibility also may be required to ensure rapid action, and we ask you to consider it within the confines of ensuring the safety of the food being supplied.

This is an opportunity for USDA to act quickly to produce a win for food banks and a win for farmers. It is a chance for government to serve as a facilitator while clearing bureaucracy and red tape. We pledge our willingness to work with you and your staff in quickly implementing such a program in response to urgent, critical needs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Babineaux-Fontenot', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Claire Babineaux-Fontenot
CEO
Feeding America

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Zippy Duvall', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Zippy Duvall
President
American Farm Bureau Federation