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May 5, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue  
Secretary of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue,

I write to request additional assistance be provided for family farmers and those experiencing heightened food insecurity due to the outbreak of COVID-19. As COVID-19 shuts restaurants and upends traditional food supply chains, we're witnessing two devastating images that should never happen at the same time: demand surges at food banks while farmers have tragically had to dispose of high-quality food. While I appreciate the steps taken by your Department to date, many of your support programs have been too heavily skewed toward large agribusinesses and not enough to family farms, as you yourself conceded in your interview on 60 Minutes this week.<sup>1</sup> I believe more actions are needed to confront this unique and immense challenge, many of which you are authorized to do today.

As demand for food banks have increased an average of 70 percent, farmers throughout the country were forced to destroy their crops as their traditional supply chains broke down.<sup>2</sup> At its worst, dairy farmers were forced to dispose of around 3.7 million gallons of milk every day.<sup>3</sup> With these supply chains likely to face unprecedented strains for weeks or months to come, robust actions from the federal government are needed to find alternative supply lines to ensure farmers have somewhere to send their products and at-risk communities facing increased food insecurity.

States and local communities have risen to the challenge by developing new and innovative approaches to connecting producers with either needy families or with additional processing capacity following the closure of several large meat processing facilities in the Midwest. In recent weeks, Wisconsin's Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) partnered with local organizations to set up the Wisconsin Dairy Recovery Program,<sup>4</sup> as well as the 'Passion for Pork' Initiative,<sup>5</sup> to support Wisconsin dairy farmers and pork producers who have been particularly hard hit from COVID-19. Further, a parish in my congressional district in southwest Wisconsin partnered with a local food bank to create 'Curds for Kids' to directly

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/farmers-coronavirus-pandemic-china-tariffs-relief-60-minutes-2020-05-03/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-blog/want-help-food-banks-during-pandemic-heres-how>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/02/business/coronavirus-food-waste-destroyed.html?referringSource=articleShare>

<sup>4</sup> [https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/News\\_Media/WIDairyRecoveryRelease.aspx](https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/News_Media/WIDairyRecoveryRelease.aspx)

<sup>5</sup> [https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/News\\_Media/DATCP\\_WPA\\_PorkInitiative.aspx](https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/News_Media/DATCP_WPA_PorkInitiative.aspx)

connect dairy products with families in need to support their local dairy farmers as well as families facing food insecurity.<sup>6</sup>

These efforts are laudable and making a real impact in their local communities, but they will not be enough on their own to ensure family farmers have the support they need to make it through this crisis. Traditional food banks are facing funding limitations and diminished numbers of volunteers as COVID-19 continues to spread. To match the enormity of this challenge, USDA must quickly find innovative ways of their own to distribute these high-quality products to those in need.

In particular, USDA should find ways to amplify the efforts already taking place within individual states and communities. These efforts have been both creative and effective in providing immediate support for farmers and families in need. A national coordination strategy from USDA would only serve to boost these efforts.

USDA should also identify new ways to take advantage of the commercial size facilities that are currently sitting dormant as COVID-19 has shuttered restaurants, schools, and other organizations throughout the country. When appropriate, USDA should work in conjunction with the National Guard to provide immediate relief to particularly hard-hit areas where volunteers may be difficult to find. The National Guard has already been providing critical assistance to some food banks, and they are uniquely situated to step in to provide support when other avenues may be unavailable.<sup>7</sup>

More action is needed to support family farms in Wisconsin and throughout the nation, and I believe there are more steps that can be quickly taken by your agency. I also stand ready to assist with any further efforts to ensure family farming remains the backbone of rural Wisconsin's economy following this crisis. I appreciate your consideration and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ron Kind". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ron Kind  
Member of Congress

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.weau.com/content/news/Curds-for-Kids-helps-farmers-and-families-569667921.html>

<sup>7</sup> <https://local12.com/news/local/national-guard-replaces-most-volunteers-at-ohio-food-banks-cincinnati>