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May 1, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Perdue:

I am writing to urge the Department of Agriculture to support the creation of strategic food reserves in Oregon as a model for the nation facing emergencies like the current COVID-19 crisis. The reserves will address food insecurity in times of peace and prepare the state for increases in food demands during times of emergency.

In addition, I ask that the Department provide emergency food supplies to Oregon as soon as possible to fill the current 70% rise in demand the Oregon food banks are currently experiencing.

USDA has the ability to support farms and ranches in the United States with loans, purchases, payments, and other operations. It also has the authority to purchase and donate food to domestic relief agencies and assist in the development of new domestic markets and marketing facilities for agricultural commodities.

I ask the USDA to use its capacity to support the current hunger needs in Oregon and an Oregon specific program that identifies immediate availability of food that is in oversupply and at risk of being dumped due to market disruption. It can also work with and pay Oregon processors to freeze, aseptically pack, dry, and create shelf-life for their product to go into storage. In addition, USDA could support this endeavor by providing money for warehouse construction or preparation through the Rural Development Community Facilities Direct Loan and Grant Program.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated an already fragile food supply chain in Oregon and the nation. The farmers and agriculture producers who help feed my state have been hit hard by this pandemic and the need for a program that provides long term stability in times of crisis, has never been more apparent. I commend USDA's new Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) for providing a similar service by working with local and regional distributors to purchase their products. That program needs to work as quickly and efficiently as possible - each day of delay is another day of hunger for thousands of Oregonians and millions of Americans.

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Oregon needs help immediately and Oregon needs a long-term program that will not only address food insecurity during COVID-19 but also provide food security for any future emergency.

I appreciate the work the Department of Agriculture has done to assist the country with food insecurity and look forward to working with you on this in the days ahead.

Sincerely,

  
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Ron Wyden  
United States Senator