

March 23, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Perdue:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations representing the fresh produce supply chain, we urge USDA's to take swift action purchasing commodities currently sitting stagnant in the supply chain as a result of the Proclamation on Declaring a National Emergency Concerning the Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Outbreak.

We estimate that there is at least \$1 billion of perishable commodities without a dedicated destination as a result of the unanticipated closure of foodservice establishments, including restaurants, hotels, schools, and universities. There is no reason these high-quality, nutritious, farmer-grown products should be left in facilities to rot when there are so many American families who are suddenly faced with food insecurity. These growers and companies are already donating to food banks and others in need, and will continue to show generosity to their communities, but they are also facing their own economic crises. Simply put, without funding coming in, there may be no workforce to facilitate donations.

USDA should utilize all purchasing authority options, including but not limited to, Section 32, current existing funding through DOD Fresh, and the Food Purchase and Distribution Program for the procurement of existing foodservice inventory of fresh produce. In addition to the existing authority, USDA must consider any and all flexibility to purchase product. Delays of months will not suffice. For example, with nationwide closures of schools, thousands of USDA-funded school meal programs have cancelled orders. These products, already approved for and appropriate for children and families, could be immediately redirected to any feeding program. This is an unprecedented time and it will take unprecedented measures and innovative approaches to address the needs of businesses and communities.

We stand ready and willing to work with USDA to facilitate this request and ensure that we do right and feed everyone, together.

Sincerely,

United Fresh Produce Association
Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association
Western Growers
National Potato Council
American Mushroom Institute
California Avocado Commission
California Citrus Mutual
California Farm Bureau Federation

California Fresh Fruit Association
California Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement
California Table Grape Commission
Colorado Potato Administrative Committee
Cranberry Institute
Empire State Potato Growers
Florida Citrus Packers
Florida Tomato Exchange
Florida Watermelon Association
Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association
Georgia Watermelon Association
Grower-Shipper Association of Central California
Gulf Coast Watermelon Association
Maine Potato Board
Michigan Apple Committee
National Onion Association
New York Apple Association
North American Strawberry Growers Association
North Carolina Blueberry Council
North Carolina Potato Association
North Carolina Vegetable Growers Association
North Carolina Watermelon Association
Northwest Horticultural Council
Pennsylvania Vegetable Growers Association
Produce Marketing Association
Southeast Produce Council
Texas Citrus Mutual
Texas International Produce Association
United Potato Growers of America
US Apple Association
US Sweet Potato Council
Ventura County Agricultural Association
Western Watermelon Association
Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association