

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 24, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We write regarding the urgent need to ensure the food security of Americans struggling due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has placed extraordinary burdens on families because of job loss, reduced hours, and related economic insecurity. At the same time, the pandemic has also put the livelihood of our farmers at risk, as demand has slowed and normal channels of distribution have changed dramatically.

We appreciate your efforts to stand up the Farmers to Families Food Box Initiative in order to address food insecurity and also to support farmers and agricultural markets at the same time. However, we are concerned about “last mile” delivery. Unless we can ensure that the Farmers to Families Food Box Initiative is able to transport needed goods the final mile to families in need, it is likely that the program will not be able to live up to its full potential. To address these challenges, we urge you to dedicate \$50 million in available funding to support last mile delivery efforts and ensure that food is able to directly and efficiently reach the families most in need. This is especially important for seniors, immunocompromised individuals and families who lack access to reliable transportation. Through this funding, USDA could support last mile delivery to help ensure that the intended goals of the Farmers to Families Food Box program are achieved.

Whether in the heartland, the south, or our coastal cities, the reality on the ground is that a serious gap exists in getting food boxes from pantries and food banks to at risk populations battling poor health, lack of mobility, or limited means. With 1 in 5 Americans now food insecure, we believe a sense of urgency exists in identifying innovative approaches to last mile delivery.

The United Way’s Ride United program is one example of the critical efforts that are needed to meet last mile delivery demands. Through the Ride United program, United Way has been able to partner with Door Dash in 8 pilot cities, and is able to dispatch drivers to pick up food boxes at pantries and food banks and deliver them to at risk callers. To date, with philanthropic investments from the Rockefeller Foundation, Door Dash, and Albertsons/Safeway, they have been able to deliver over 20,000 food boxes.

Given the spike in Americans experiencing hunger due to the COVID-19 crisis and the dauntingly long lines at food banks, we believe that providing support to meet last mile delivery demands is both urgent and timely. With \$50 million, USDA could provide funding to organizations and entities like United Way to expand delivery options. The United Way estimates that \$50 million would enable over five million deliveries, delivering 100 million pounds of food or 83 million meals through their model. Further, the investment would also help generate income and work opportunities for thousands of drivers conducting the deliveries. Targeted funding could help ensure delivery of the food boxes is available for both urban and rural communities.

We share your interest in building out the Farmers to Families Food Box program at this critical time, and we believe that allocating \$50 million to support last mile delivery needs would further fulfill the intent of Congress to provide expedited and temporary economic relief to those in need of food, and strengthen the ultimate impact and effectiveness of the Farmers to Families Food Box program. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



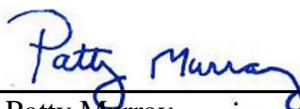
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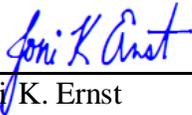
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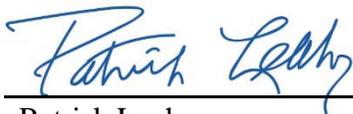
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