

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

May 29, 2020

Sonny Perdue  
Secretary of Agriculture  
United States Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue,

We appreciate the commitments that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has made in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic to help farmers who have lost revenue, fortify our food supply chain, and address rising food insecurity. We are writing to draw your attention to the concerns and recommendations that have been relayed by Commissioner Amanda Beal of the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry in regards to USDA's Farmers to Families Food Box Program, a component of the broader Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP).

Maine has a proud farming heritage and a thriving agriculture industry. Our farmers, producers, and distributors are dedicated to helping feed their communities – especially in times of crisis. As such, many Maine companies desire to participate in the Farmers to Families Food Box Program. Given timing and other logistical challenges, thus far no Maine distributors have been selected to participate in this program. Furthermore, those distributors who were awarded contracts outside of Maine were only able to provide an extremely limited number of produce boxes to Maine-based partners, due to limited capacity and food safety concerns.

We understand that of the \$3 billion allocated for the Farmers to Families Food Box Program, only \$1.2 billion has been awarded thus far, with an additional \$1.8 billion expected to be awarded by September 2020. As Maine farmers and families continue to weather this storm of uncertainty without the help of CFAP's food box program, we urge USDA to reopen this bidding process in order to fill the glaring regional gaps that have resulted.

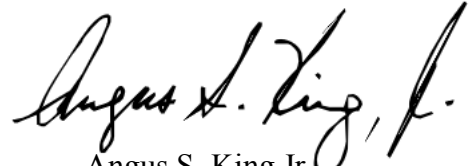
In addition to reopening the bidding process, we request that USDA allow for increased flexibility of the design and assembly of boxes. Greater flexibility of box design and assembly requirements would enable local partners to participate more easily, and would allow nutritious, local food to be distributed across rural communities nationwide, including those in Maine.

We thank USDA for its work on behalf of our nation's farmers and producers, and look forward to working with you to ensure Maine is able to reap the benefits of the Farmers to Families Food Box Program.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins  
United States Senator



Angus S. King Jr.  
United States Senator



Chellie Pingree  
Member of Congress



Jared Golden  
Member of Congress

cc: Mr. Bruce Summers, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service Administrator