

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

March 4, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
U.S. Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

New England farmers began cultivating apples in America nearly 150 years before our country gained its independence, and have had a proud apple growing tradition ever since. Enduring natural disasters and economic downturns, many family-owned orchards in the northeast have survived through hard work and ingenuity. Recent industry and international disruptions, however, have put these growers in an untenable situation that threatens their continued existence.

We outlined the plight of Maine apple growers in a September 2019 letter to you, and in response you noted that through its Agricultural Trade Promotion Program (ATP), the USDA provided nearly \$10 million to the Washington Apple Commission. While this funding was helpful to the apple exporters in the northwestern U.S., these payments have benefited large agribusinesses that have long-dictated the U.S. apple market, and were not at all helpful to the smaller growers in the Northeast. As one Maine grower put it, the smaller operations like his are failing in part because the government is bailing out the largest operations, which are much better equipped to weather the instability in the current market.

The vast majority of Maine apple farms are 15 acres or less, and the overall number of acres being used to grow apples in the state has declined steadily in recent years (from more than 3,330 in 2012 to roughly 2,670 in 2017). Unfortunately, the \$23 billion in agricultural aid spent thus far under President Trump's administration has not improved the financial stability of these growers. Additionally, it does not inspire confidence within these smaller-scale businesses to hear it is your view that the "big get bigger and small go out" in modern American agriculture. We do not believe that consolidation in agriculture is inevitable. Rather, we believe that diversity of scale is a strength of our agricultural industry that federal policy should support.

While farmers tell us that they much prefer free, open trade to government aid, should the USDA consider administering an additional round of agricultural aid payments, we strongly urge your department to extend such support to small farms and orchards – not simply the most prominent players in the industry. In the absence of additional aid payments, we urge you to develop other means to support small growers, such as expanding targeted grant programs. Our

offices stand ready to work with the Department to find meaningful ways to support the small- and- medium-sized businesses that make up a critical part of our agricultural industry.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. Should there be any questions please have your staff contact Cameron O'Brien (Collins) at 202-224-2523 or Will Woolworth (Golden) at 202-225-6306.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



Jared Golden
Member of Congress