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October 23, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
11400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue,

It has come to my attention that food banks across my home state of Missouri have seen a significant decline in recent weeks in the supply of food made available to them through the Farmers to Families Food Box program. Several stakeholders have also told me of a drop in food quality associated with the program, as contracts with out-of-state producers have complicated the distribution process.

The Farmers to Families Food Box program has been a critical lifeline for thousands of needy families across my state throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Missouri foodbanks and other emergency nutrition providers have seen dramatic increases in demand in recent months as desperate families look for any way to make ends meet.¹ Reducing the amount and quality of food available through the program at this juncture is a serious cause for concern.

With millions out of work, businesses fighting to stay afloat, and hundreds of thousands of people joining the unemployment rolls on a weekly basis, federal nutrition programs will continue to play an essential role in helping families weather this crisis. The Farmers to Food Box program is a key part of the federal relief framework and should be prioritized.

Given the impending end to the program on October 31, 2020, and no announcement of additional rounds of contracts,² I ask for a response to the following questions:

- What amount of CARES Act funding has been allocated to the Farmers to Families Food Box program?
- Does the USDA plan to offer an additional round of contracts for the Farmers to Families Food Box program? If so, how much money will be made available for the next round, and when can the public expect an announcement in this regard?

¹ https://www.stltoday.com/pr/news/st-louis-area-foodbank-distributes-more-than-16-7-million-meals-throughout-the-bi-state/article_b615b01e-c5ef-11ea-af05-5cb9017befcf.html

² <https://www.ams.usda.gov/selling-food-to-usda/farmers-to-families-food-box>

- What plans has the USDA put in place to avoid a stark end to program operations on October 31, 2020? And what communications has the USDA had with producers, distributors, and state leaders to safeguard against this?
- Does the USDA have the resources available, either through CARES Act appropriations or in general USDA funds, to continue the program until at least the end of 2020? If not, what additional resources would be needed from Congress to do so?
- Program dollars are distributed by formula based on county population and unemployment levels. What accountability measures are in place to ensure that poorly managed states do not get a disproportionate amount of aid to the detriment of others? How are the additional distribution challenges and costs presented by rural areas being taken into account in funding allocation decisions?
- What quality control and oversight measures has the USDA taken to ensure that the highest quality foods available are being delivered in a timely manner through the Farmers to Families Food Box program?
- Has USDA considered what funding level would be required to expand the program in the coming months to meet the full demand of hunger and nutrition needs?

Thank you for your attention to this important issue, and I look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Josh Hawley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Josh Hawley
United States Senator