

January 12, 2021

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

Dear Secretary Perdue:

The fresh produce industry is committed to prioritizing the safety of our workers, whether harvest crews in the field or employees in packing facilities, all while keeping the food supply chain moving. Produce workers play an essential role in feeding American consumers and the world at a time when our healthy fruits and vegetables are more in need than ever. With every stage of the emerging COVID-19 crisis, our industry never stopped, never slowed down and we never went virtual. Food continued growing and we continued harvesting, packing, and providing that product to families across the globe. Our industry was the earliest adopters and embraced public health advice for social distancing, personal and facility hygiene, face coverings and more.

In December, Congress passed H.R. 133 the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 which included important resources to address COVID-19 related issues the country is currently facing. As part of this funding, resources were devoted to the Department of Agriculture to implement a number of programs including creating grants and loans to help the agriculture supply chain “protect workers against COVID-19.” With the inclusion of these very important provisions, we STRONGLY encourage USDA to prioritize the implementation of this part of the law in an efficient manner with input from stakeholders. Farmers have already incurred substantial worker safety costs during 2020 and face additional costs going forward. We ask for a system that helps offset both past and future costs, as additional efforts in 2021 will be required to keep our agricultural employees safe. As a result, funding should be substantial such as the \$1 billion suggested in bipartisan legislation S. 3785.

In addition, speed is absolutely of the essence and the urgency in which we ask USDA to act cannot be understated. The fresh produce industry has taken no days off throughout this pandemic, and nor do we intend to. We simply ask that the Department provide the assistance quickly, effectively and for the purposes intended by Congress. Most importantly we strongly believe that by allocating funding and resources towards measures focused on worker safety, our industry will continue to build on our commitment to the safety and wellbeing of our employees, the safety of the products they harvest, and the health of all Americans who will continue to consume and demand fresh produce as part of their daily intake to fight back against this virus. Without a safe and healthy work force, we could not continue to meet that challenge.

We thank Congress for prioritizing this issue and look forward to working with the Administration to prioritize resources for these issues and ensure a safe workplace for our employees and a safe and abundant food supply for our country.

Sincerely,

United Fresh Produce Association
National Potato Council
US Apple Association
Northwest Horticultural Council
Western Growers
Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association
California Citrus Mutual
California Farm Bureau Federation
California Fresh Fruit Association
GA Fruit and Vegetable Growers Assoc.
Texas International Produce Association
American Mushroom Institute
National Onion Association
National Peach Council
National Watermelon Association
North American Blueberry Council
Produce Marketing Association
US Sweet Potato Council
Southeast Produce Council, Inc.
United Potato Growers of America
California Apple Commission
California Avocado Commission
California Blueberry Commission
California Blueberry Association
Grower-Shipper Association of Central California
Olive Growers Council of California
Colorado Potato Administrative Committee
Florida Strawberry Growers Association
Florida Tomato Exchange
Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association
Idaho Potato Commission
Idaho Hop Growers Association
Maine Potato Board
Michigan Apple Association
Michigan Blueberry Advisory Committee
New York Apple Association
Northern Plains Potato Growers Association
Ohio Apple Marketing Association
Fruit Growers Marketing Association
Ohio Produce Growers Marketing Association
PA Co-operative Potato Growers
Texas Citrus Mutual
Washington State Tree Fruit Association

CC: House and Senate Agriculture Leadership
President-Elect Biden Transition Team