

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

April 6, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We write to request swift assistance for Rhode Island's small specialty crop producers, non-commodity farmers, ranchers, and shellfish growers impacted by coronavirus. These producers are the backbone for Rhode Island's local food economy and help sustain approximately 60,000 jobs in the state.

Many of Rhode Island's small and specialty crop producers have seen markets for their products disappear as restaurants have closed or scaled back operations and other institutional sales opportunities have dwindled. Because of their size, many of these producers lack the financial reserves to weather this storm without assistance. As you know, Congress provided \$9.5 billion in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Stabilization (CARES) Act for agricultural producers impacted by coronavirus, including producers of specialty crops and producers that supply local food systems, including farmers markets, restaurants, and schools.

As you work to distribute the funding provided under the CARES Act, we urge you to provide direct relief to our producers for economic losses incurred due to coronavirus. Furthermore, we ask you to help small producers cover the costs of product sold to support emergency feeding efforts, additional equipment or services require to maintain safe and sanitary conditions on farms or food stands, and any necessary storage for agricultural products. Rhode Island stakeholders are also working quickly to strengthen local food systems, including by developing new direct-to-consumer options like home delivery, and we encourage you to support these efforts.

We strongly urge you to work with the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) to distribute these funds to producers. RIDEM's Division of Agriculture has expertise dispersing federal funds along with strong relationships with Rhode Island's producers. Providing a portion of these funds directly to RIDEM will help ensure an equitable distribution of the funds to our state's small producers.

In addition, we appreciate the Department of Agriculture's (USDA) recent decision to provide additional flexibilities to the Farm Service Agency to delay loan repayments. We strongly urge you to consider extending payments deadlines, offering opportunities to restructure loans and provide loan forgiveness, and suspending all collection activities for the duration of the crisis. USDA should use every tool in the toolbox to ensure the continued strength of our local food systems.

While we do not know what the long-term impact of coronavirus on the Rhode Island food system will be, any relief program must include assistance for small producers who have been impacted by coronavirus.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests within all applicable rules and regulations, and we stand ready to work with you to help get our farmers and producers through these extraordinary circumstances.

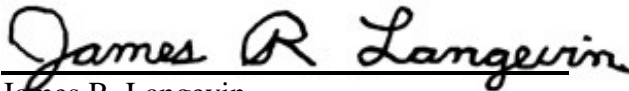
Sincerely,



Jack Reed
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



James R. Langevin
Member of Congress



David N. Cicilline
Member of Congress