

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 13, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Paul Kiecker
Administrator
Food Safety and Inspection Service
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue and Administrator Kiecker:

We write today to ask for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) assistance on an urgent issue facing agricultural producers in our home state of Oregon. As you know, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted meat processing operations and has had negative impacts on the food supply chain, both in Oregon and nationwide.

We have heard from the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) that due to disruptions within the national meat processing system, it is becoming harder for Oregon farmers and ranchers to find available processing options. Oregon agricultural producers are already facing depressed markets, and are rapidly reaching a point at which their livestock are getting too big for slaughter and may instead have to be euthanized. This is an unacceptable outcome when many of these producers wish to sell meat products to consumers or donate those products to food programs; healthcare facilities; and nonprofit, faith-based, or private food banks that are struggling to meet the increased need of Oregon residents who have been economically impacted by the coronavirus.

The State of Oregon currently has no state meat inspection program, though the state legislature is actively working toward reestablishing such a program and is working diligently on the framework to present to the USDA. In the interim, the state is pursuing innovative solutions to enable custom slaughter facilities that currently are not subject to federal inspection requirements to process meat raised in-state for the purposes of sale or donation to Oregonians.

We ask that the USDA work with ODA in a creative and collaborative fashion to help Oregon address this challenge. If possible, we encourage USDA to consider options such as assisting processing facilities to be compliant should a state program be approved; working with ODA to expedite a state inspection program by providing training and technical assistance; and providing options for Oregon producers during this challenging time. We also urge the USDA to ensure throughout any potential process that all relevant and applicable food safety and animal welfare issues are fully addressed.

Members of our teams, Dianne Nellor on the Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee (dianne_nellor@senate.appro.gov), Logan Hollers (logan_hollers@merkley.senate.gov) with Senator Merkley, and Bobby Ahern (bobby_ahern@wyden.senate.gov) with Senator Wyden, are ready and determined to collaborate with USDA, with ODA, and with Oregon producers to find

solutions to this challenge. We truly appreciate the work the USDA has done thus far to address our nation's food supply chain issues, and thank you for your consideration of this request during this unprecedented time.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Jeffrey A. Merkley in blue ink, written over a horizontal line.

Jeffrey A. Merkley
U.S. Senator, Oregon

Handwritten signature of Ron Wyden in blue ink, written over a horizontal line.

Ron Wyden
U.S. Senator, Oregon