

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 17, 2020

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

The Honorable Michael Pompeo  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Secretaries Perdue and Pompeo,

As COVID-19 continues to spread here at home and around the world, it is increasingly clear that we are experiencing a global health emergency on an unprecedented scale that threatens global economic prosperity. The novel coronavirus especially threatens to frustrate efforts to reduce global hunger, rolling back hard-fought gains from the past decade and exacerbating already troubling trends in the last three years. This will ultimately have direct impacts on the economic and security interests of the United States.

Ensuring an adequate supply of food requires farmers to remain in their fields, food processors to keep their facilities running, trucks to remain on the road, ports to remain open, and consumers to keep educated. While we take steps to ensure these things in our own country, we must also support others internationally to do the same, especially in low-income countries. What we learned from the 2007/8 global food price crisis was that export restrictions, market speculation and panic buying only served to put food further out of reach for vulnerable populations. We are not protected against these same inclinations today and must remain diligent to avoid them.

Today, 821 million people around the world suffer from undernourishment and over 100 million are facing immediate, life-threatening hunger. Global food security depends on countries like ours accessing and responding to global markets—this is especially true in a crisis like the one we're facing now. The U.S. exports about \$140 billion worth of agricultural products each year. American farmers are inextricably linked by global markets and, by extension, to the wellbeing of people everywhere.

Even in the best of times, though, there are inevitable food supply chain breaks and other market disruptions that occur around the world. In these events, American-produced commodities are also purchased and distributed internationally as food aid. For the better part of 70 years, the United States has provided this humanitarian support to billions of people in need, helping save countless lives.

Every major disease outbreak in recent memory has had negative impacts on food security. If not handled properly, COVID-19 threatens to break critical food supply chains, produce food shortages and drive up the price of food in many markets. In developing countries where people spend more than half of their income on food and rely heavily on food imports, the risk is especially great. It is in these same places that undernourishment is already most prevalent, healthcare infrastructure most limited, and social safety nets most lacking. As we've learned from other infectious diseases like Ebola and HIV, nutrition plays a large role in survivability and staving off infection.

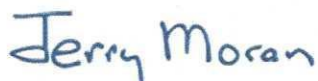
Perhaps most devastating to vulnerable, food insecure populations around the world is the impact that COVID-19 will have on economies. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development has already cut its projections for global GDP growth this year from 3 percent to 1.5 percent based on the virus' impact. Researchers at the International Food Policy Research Institute are estimating that this economic slowdown could force another 20 to 30 million people into extreme poverty. In the case of major disruptions to global trade, food export from sub-Saharan Africa may fall by as much as 25 percent, threatening agricultural livelihoods.

We can help to protect against this, in part, by providing high-quality U.S.-grown commodities like wheat, sorghum, soybeans, corn, or rice to people suffering from hunger and living in places where markets aren't properly functioning or able to meet demand. This is why, each year, we support robust funding for critical international food assistance programs, including USAID's Food for Peace and USDA's McGovern-Dole Food for Education. With depressed U.S. commodity prices, these humanitarian exports help American farmers, while also feeding a hungry world.

The U.S. food and agricultural trading system must remain open for business and well-functioning during this period; so too must our food aid programs. Even in the face of disruptions to the lives of civil servants at USDA and USAID around the world, we must ensure that these programs are efficiently and effectively administered and that program funds are promptly obligated. While the full extent of market disruptions and impacts on vulnerable populations produced by COVID-19 are yet to be seen, humanitarian organizations that deliver this American generosity are already pre-positioning food in high-priority areas around the world. We should be taking every possible step to ensure they are able to perform this and other tasks expeditiously and with sufficient resources.

As the Co-Chairs of the National Security Advisory Council of the U.S. Global Leadership Coalition, Admiral James Stavridis (Ret.) and General Tony Zinni (Ret.) write, "No matter how successful we are fighting COVID19 pandemic at home, we'll never stop it unless we're also fighting it around the world." United States food aid programs build stronger markets and more stable societies, helping countries get back on their feet to become U.S. trading partners again. They also provide a market for American farmers and their families right now when they need it most. What a great opportunity it is when our interests as a nation align with what is morally right.

Sincerely,



Jerry Moran  
United States Senator

/s/ Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senator



John Boozman  
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator