

United States Senate

April 13, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Perdue,

It is critical for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to ensure that food banks across the country are able to cope with the large influx of Americans seeking food in the wake of economic instability caused by COVID-19. I urge USDA to expedite purchases and allow maximum flexibility in distributing food through the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) during the COVID-19 outbreak, to use Section 32 funds for commodity purchases, storage and distribution by food banks, and to proactively make States aware of their ability to request permission to operate the Disaster Household Distribution (DHD) program to help speed assistance to communities.

COVID-19 has caused severe economic stress across the country. This, in turn, has caused a large increase in the number of Americans who are relying on food banks to feed themselves and their families. My state has seen unprecedented demand and long lines at our food banks as this pandemic takes its toll on our economy, including food banks in Kansas City, Pittsburg, Salina and Wichita. Harvesters, the food bank network in the Kansas City area, saw its largest order-processing day in its 40-year history at the end of March. Kansas Food Bank in Wichita is on pace to double the amount of food it sends in March and April to partner agencies in the 85 counties it serves. With current supplies, food banks are not equipped to handle this influx of customers.

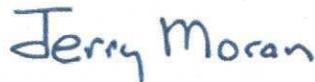
In response to this need, Congress has designated \$850 million to TEFAP in an effort to provide food banks with the supplies they need as part of Phases II and III of the coronavirus recovery packages. However, food banks do not expect to receive food from this funding until late June or July. At the same time, many food banks expect to run out of existing TEFAP supplies in the next two to four weeks. Because of this, I ask that you fully use USDA's authority to expedite purchases of TEFAP foods and provide maximum flexibility to food banks in distributing the food so that food banks may take advantage of these funds as early as possible.

There are additional avenues of support for food banks that I urge you to take that may provide assistance in a more expedient manner. Section 32 funds should be used to purchase commodities for distribution to food banks. As the pandemic causes supply chains to shift, there are many producers who are struggling to find buyers for their food. USDA can purchase the food, ensure it is in household friendly sizes, and help provide the distribution support to make

sure food banks can distribute it to the millions in need they are serving. To help ease the regulatory burden on food banks, states should also be made aware of their ability to request to operate the Disaster Household Distribution (DHD) program.

Thank you for what USDA has done over the past few weeks to ensure that vulnerable Americans continue to have access to food. The Department has been responsive and decisive, acting swiftly to ensure that low-income families receive meals in a safe manner. Now, we must do all we can to help food banks meet the unprecedented challenge of providing meals to a growing number of Americans in need and provide support to our agricultural producers who have lost markets for their food during this pandemic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jerry Moran". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Jerry Moran
United States Senator