

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 11, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Minority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
House Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington D.C. 20510

Speaker Pelosi, Leader McCarthy, Majority Leader McConnell, and Minority Leader Schumer,

As the Senate considers legislation relevant to the coronavirus outbreak, we ask that you consider funding programs at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) that would assist pork producers who are being forced to depopulate pig herds due to closures of processing facilities.

After enduring extended trade disputes, U.S. hog farmers were poised to be profitable this year with expectations of climbing prices amid increasing domestic and foreign demand. Instead, restaurant closures due to the coronavirus will contribute to industry losses this year conservatively estimated at more than \$5 billion.

Now, processing plants are either shutting down or dramatically curtailing production due to outbreaks of COVID-19 within their workforce. Depending on the week, over 40% of processing capacity has been idled. This number is likely to grow, based on current reports, if no action is taken.

Plants are not expected to reopen until improved safety measures – as dictated by the Centers for Disease Control and in conjunction with local authorities – are implemented on the production line, including providing proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to employees. Without proper safety measures in place, workers in the plants will remain at a high risk at contracting the virus. Failure to ensure workplace safety at these plants could result in an even greater backlog on the farm.

The downstream impact of idled plants is full farms, creating an animal welfare crisis due to overcrowding and the challenge of providing enough feed and water available to each animal. There are pigs in various stages of the six month growth process that have nowhere to go. If processing plants are idled, then there is an immediate need to establish processes whereby some portion of the herd is humanely euthanized to prevent animal suffering. Failure to have a sensible and orderly process for thinning the herd will lead to animal health issues, environmental issues, and pork producers going out of business. Producers need assistance now if we are to have a sustainable supply of pork in the future.

The crisis is immediate. Pork producers send to market over two million pigs each week. If twenty percent of processing is idle, that means somewhere around 400,000 animals per week must be disposed of in some manner other than processing. Accordingly, government support is needed in the management of a sensible depopulation of the herd until plant operations stabilize.

Given these significant social and economic consequences, we must prioritize funding to indemnify producers who are depopulating herds due to processing plant closures. Assistance is needed for humane euthanization and disposal which will require the coordination of the human, animal, and environmental health communities.

Authority for programs at USDA to help with the consequences of closed processing facilities should be authorized as quickly as possible. Thank you for your consideration of these requests.

Sincerely,

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Charles Grassley  
United States Senator

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Joni K. Ernst  
United States Senator

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John Hoeven  
United States Senator

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Deb Fischer  
United States Senator

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Todd Young  
United States Senator

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M. Michael Rounds  
United States Senator

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Josh Hawley  
United States Senator

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Tina Smith  
United States Senator

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Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator

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Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator

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Gary Peters  
United States Senator

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Ron Wyden  
United States Senator

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Ben Sasse  
United States Senator

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Kevin Cramer  
United States Senator

\*The Senators listed above support the contents of this letter. Due to COVID-19, physical signatures for this letter were not collected.