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REPUBLICAN WHIP TEAM

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May 28, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Perdue:

Thank you for your leadership in administrating and implementing the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN) to recognize the stresses that our agricultural community faces on a day-to-day basis. As we raise awareness this Mental Health Awareness Month and with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, I urge you to expedite the disbursement of funds for FRSAN Congress provided in Fiscal Year 2020 (FY20) to address the increased stress in farm country as a result of the virus.

As you well know, farming is a high-stress occupation for a variety of reasons, and there is always a degree of financial risk uniquely inherent to the industry. Just as producers began to see improved economic conditions for the first time in over five years, the pandemic began to spread throughout the country and devastated the economy. Many farmers already faced uniquely challenging circumstances. Flooding throughout the planting and growing season as well as early frost during harvest provided a variety of challenges to recovering from the recent depression in the farm economy. Now farmers face markets affected by a global pandemic with prices dropping across nearly all major commodities. In addition, widespread euthanization of animals and disposal of product have taken hold as a result.

It is widely reported how the pandemic has fundamentally strained the food supply chain, and I appreciate the efforts the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has provided to keep farmers afloat. However, as we continue to focus on the health of farm balance sheets, attention also needs to be placed on the mental and emotional strain the virus has placed on our farmers as they keep their operations going. It is no secret that deterioration of the financial health of the farming community likely corresponds with increased stress levels. However, the effects of the virus introduce uniquely stressful situations for farmers throughout the country. For example, market-ready hogs are being euthanized throughout the Midwest to an unprecedented degree. Dairy producers in some areas of the country are dumping their milk due to supply chain disruption. Widespread devastating situations like these take a toll on the mental and emotional state of the individuals who feed and fuel us.

It is with this context that I urge you to continue your work facilitating the growth of farm stress assistance efforts throughout the country. Last Congress, the 2018 Farm Bill reauthorized a provision to provide grants to extension services, state departments of agriculture, nonprofit

organizations, and other entities to provide stress assistance programs to farmers, ranchers, farmworkers, and other agriculture-related occupations. Eligible programs include farm helplines and websites, training programs and workshops, outreach services, and home delivery of assistance. USDA has since awarded \$2 million for a pilot of the program in order to provide a bridge towards full implementation of FRSAN. Just last month, your agency issued a request for application for the \$10 million provided by Congress in FY20 that closes next month.

With the increased strain on both the financial and emotional health of our agriculture community as result of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is more important than ever to mobilize the resources Congress has granted USDA to respond to the stresses in these communities. As we raise awareness for Mental Health Awareness Month, I urge you to expedite the awarding of funds to help address the growing emotional strain in farm country.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tom Emmer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "T" and a long, horizontal flourish at the end of the name.

Tom Emmer
Member of Congress