



Janet T. Mills

GOVERNOR

STATE OF MAINE
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
1 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE
04333-0001

November 4, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Perdue:

Maine's people appreciate the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) effort regarding implementing the Farmers to Families Food Box Program. However, with the coronavirus and hunger surging, we must work together to activate the best version of the Program for Maine. As an informed and trusted resource and partner, I urge you to immediately revisit the recent decision to not include a Maine-based food distributor in the Program's fourth round of contract awards.

Maine farmers, distributors, and local partners are ready and able to feed our families impacted by food insecurity. In round two – the only round to date where Maine contractors were selected – the Maine Farmers' Exchange and Native Maine Produce & Specialty Foods demonstrated their capability to assemble and distribute food boxes, which contained nutritious food from Maine producers. As it stands now, with a contractor from Maryland selected by the USDA to begin handling distribution for our state, Maine people will receive imported food from elsewhere, and we will have no control over the quality of food included in the boxes. Further, the Program comes up short in adequately serving Maine's hard-working farmers.

During these past ten months of grappling with all the coronavirus's challenges, our Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Agriculture Commissioner, Amanda Beal, and I have repeatedly reached out to the USDA to raise awareness about the inequity of federal COVID-19 relief directed toward our farmers, as compared to other states. We are once again urging you to quickly reevaluate the contractor selection process and include a Maine distributor (or distributors) in the Program's fourth round and all subsequent contract awards. This step will allow Mainers to execute the Farmers to Families Food Box Program responsibly and put our experience and good common sense to work for the USDA and the people of Maine.

Sincerely,

Janet T. Mills
Governor

Cc: Amanda Beal, Commissioner, Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry



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