

April 24, 2020

The Vice President
Old Executive Office Building
Washington, DC 20501

Dear Mr. Vice President and Members of the Coronavirus Task Force,

Livestock production is an essential element of our nation's critical infrastructure. Due to COVID-19 workforce disruptions, U.S. pork production has lost approximately 25 percent of its processing capacity over the last 3-4 weeks. Pork production operates in a "just-in-time" fashion; at each step of the production cycle, there are pigs in line ready to move to the next stage. When pigs reach market weight, they must move to processing. Given severe processing capacity constraints, pigs are backing up on farms with nowhere to go, resulting in overcrowding and animal welfare issues. At current capacity levels, there are 700,000 pigs that cannot be processed each week and that must be humanely euthanized. Simply put, pork producers cannot operate if they can't send their pigs to market.

While the announcement by USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service that they are standing up an incident command is helpful I urgently request the additional following resources and authorities, including **invoking the Defense Production Act**, that will be required to keep pork production viable:

- **Packing plant operations:** It is critical that plants continue to operate. Worker safety is paramount, and the packing industry is doing everything it can to ensure it and follow local, state and federal recommendations. We urge you to utilize every authority available to keep plants open, and to re-open closed facilities as soon as it is possible to do so safely.
- **Humane euthanasia of hogs:** We ask that resources, including and in addition to those announced by APHIS, be deployed to assist in the humane euthanasia of animals. Resources are critically needed both **on farm and in harvest facilities** not currently producing food to safely, humanely and efficiently depopulate animals. No matter where these depopulation efforts take place, resources must be brought to bear to assure environmentally responsible disposal methods are practiced.
- **Indemnity:** Pork producers in my state and nationwide will go out of business, and the industry could further contract and consolidate, if farmers are not compensated for the animals that they have no choice but to euthanize. We strongly urge that farmers are indemnified for their euthanized hogs, including costs associated with depopulation and environmentally sound disposal, to help preserve our state's pork industry. Pork producers also need protection through legal immunity from attempts by activist organizations to penalize producers who are required to take these actions to protect the welfare of their animals.

- **Mental health assistance:** The COVID-19 pandemic presents farmers with non-economic threats as well. Mental health assistance is important to all affected, but producers who must euthanize animals cannot be forgotten. Providing mental health assistance to farmers, veterinarians and others involved in the difficult decisions and processes around euthanizing and disposing of animals is imperative.

This is an emergency in rural communities unlike any seen in recent history. Swift and decisive action will be required to preserve our farm communities and ensure that safe, affordable and abundant food remains available in this crisis. I ask for your immediate assistance in addressing these critical needs,

Sincerely,

cc: The Honorable Sonny Perdue, Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture
The Honorable Alex M. Azar, Secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
The Honorable Chad Wolf, Secretary, U.S. Department of Homeland Security