



# Durbin Presses Agriculture Secretary Perdue on Food Stamps, Trade, Immigration Reform

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) today, in the first Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee hearing of the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, pressed U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Sonny Perdue about access to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for the elderly and those with disabilities, how President Trump’s trade war with China is hurting the price of soybeans in Illinois, and whether he would support comprehensive immigration reform for more than 1.4 million undocumented farmworkers in America.

Durbin first asked Perdue whether he would commit to not strip SNAP benefits from residential facilities for low-income elderly and disabled people, which USDA has sought to do in recent years in Illinois. In Illinois, there are 150 supportive senior living facilities serving 8,000 low-income people. Durbin and Senator Duckworth secured an 18-month delay in the 2018 Farm Bill from any USDA action to strip these Illinois facilities from SNAP.

**“When it comes to seniors in support living facilities, many of whom are facing illness, disability, mental illness, and the like, I hope that we won’t treat them as they’re somehow cheating their government,”** Durbin said.

Durbin then asked Perdue what he plans to do to reassure farmers in Illinois about the price drop for soybeans. Trade issues have significantly hurt soybean prices, which are down over a dollar a bushel from their level when President Trump took office.

**“Illinois is proud to be the largest agricultural producer of soybeans in the United States. Since President Trump took office, the price of a bushel of soybeans has gone down one dollar. We believe that the trade policy of the Administration could threaten the progress we’ve made in establishing customers around the world. I**

**hear that from soybean growers all the time, so what would you tell them?” Durbin said.**

Lastly, Durbin asked Perdue whether he would support a comprehensive immigration reform bill in order to address the status of undocumented agricultural workers. The 2013 Senate comprehensive immigration reform bill would have provided a pathway to citizenship for an estimated 1.4 million undocumented farmworkers who have been part of the backbone of agriculture labor in the U.S. Perdue noted that besides trade, immigrant labor is something he gets regularly asked about in his travels throughout the country.

**“Migrant workers and undocumented workers are critical to the survival of American agriculture. If we are declaring war on immigrants and undocumented immigrants, we’ve got some questions that need to be answered when it comes to dairy operations, and fruits and vegetables,” Durbin said.**