

# **Durbin, Duckworth, Bipartisan Senators Press USDA to Provide Relief for Local Farmers During COVID-19 Pandemic**

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WASHINGTON, DC – U.S. Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) joined Senators Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Lisa Murkowski (R-AL), Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), and a bipartisan group of Senators in urging the Trump Administration to provide relief for local farmers who are struggling as the nation works to combat the spread of COVID-19. In a letter sent to U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Sonny Perdue, the Senators urged USDA to ensure that a portion of the \$9.5 billion they secured in the *Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act*

, goes to local farmers who sell directly to consumers, schools, institutions, food hubs, regional distribution centers, retail markets, farmers markets and restaurants.

“The CARES Act specifically includes ‘producers that supply local food systems, including farmers markets, restaurants, and schools’ among those eligible for the assistance,” the Senators wrote. “We write today to emphasize the high level of damages being experienced by local food producers and to provide comments on fair allocation of the CARES payments.”

In addition to urging USDA to ensure relief is getting to local farmers, the Senators also pressed the department to administer direct payments through the Farm Service Agency in response to the local food industry’s projected \$1.1 billion loss in revenue. They asked that in order to be eligible to receive a direct payment, local food producers should derive at least 25 percent of total farm income from sales that are locally purchased, including food sold directly to consumers.

And to reach new and underserved farmers, the Senators requested that the Farm Service Agency waive requirements that farms obtain USDA farm numbers in order to participate in FSA-administered assistance programs during the 2020 crop year. They also urged USDA to establish a national hotline to manage incoming producer inquiries, simplify the application process, and make information about the program available in multiple languages.

In addition to Durbin, Duckworth, Brown, Murkowski and Stabenow, the letter was also signed by Senators Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Patty Murray (D-WA), Jack Reed (D-RI), Susan Collins (R-ME), Bob Menendez (D-NJ), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Bob Casey (D-PA), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Tom Udall (D-NM), Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), Mark Warner (D-VA), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Kristen Gillibrand (D-NY), Joe Manchin (D-WV), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Brian Schatz (D-HI), Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Chris Murphy (D-CT), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Martin Heinrich (D-NM), Angus King (I-ME), Tim Kaine (D-VA), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Gary Peters (D-MI), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), and Tina Smith (D-MN).