

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 10, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Secretary Perdue:

We write today concerning the recent implementation of the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Farmers to Families Food Box program. We understand the enormous challenges you and your team are facing in combatting the effects of COVID-19, and we appreciate your efforts to assist farmers, food banks, and address food insecurity during this difficult time. However, we are deeply concerned that the Commonwealth of Virginia has received a disproportionately small share of food under this program to date.

As of today, we understand food banks in the Feeding America network in Virginia are expected to receive approximately 2.3 million pounds of food out of the 264 million pounds of product that are expected to be distributed during the first phase of the Farmers to Families Food Box program. If this program were allocated in the same manner as The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), we would expect Virginia to receive about 5.3 million pounds of product – more than double the current amount anticipated.

In addition, only one Virginia-based distributor – DeLune Corp in Springfield, Virginia – was awarded a contract in the first round of approval. This has made it difficult to get food boxes to all of Virginia's food banks – especially in Southwest Virginia. We have heard from a number of our food banks that have had difficulty finding approved distributors in the Mid-Atlantic region willing to provide food boxes. As you can imagine, this has put many of our food banks in a difficult position as they continue to experience record demand due to the ongoing public health crisis.

In order to better understand this program and how allocations were made, we ask that you please respond to the following questions:

1. In awarding the first round of contracts, did USDA require awardees to demonstrate that they could service certain geographic areas to ensure each state in a region would receive coverage proportional to population and need? In future contract awards, will USDA examine a distributor's capability to service large and diverse geographic areas?

2. How does USDA intend to award subsequent contracts under this program in a way that ensures a fair distribution of the national allotment? What information will USDA consider as it makes future contract awards to ensure each state and region is treated equitably?
3. According to press reports, at least one company that received a contract, Ben Holtz Consulting DBA California Avocados Direct, has had their contract terminated. How will this funding be re-allocated? Have any other contracts been revoked?
4. Did USDA solicit information from food banks to assess their current needs before the first round of contracts were awarded? Does USDA plan to offer food banks the opportunity to provide information on the type and amount of food they need to feed their respective service areas as the agency considers future rounds of funding?

Again, we sincerely appreciate your commitment to helping keep families fed during this difficult time. We all want to ensure this program and other USDA programs designed to combat hunger work as effectively and efficiently as possible to maximize the benefits for all Americans. We look forward to continuing to work with you on ways to increase access to healthy and nutritious foods to all Americans.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

/s/ Mark R. Warner
Mark R. Warner
United States Senator

/s/ Tim Kaine
Tim Kaine
United States Senator