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# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6025  
<http://appropriations.senate.gov>

May 14, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We write with deep concerns about the slow response from the department regarding supplemental funding provided to address the coronavirus pandemic. Congress has appropriated \$36 billion to the Department of Agriculture for many important programs that the American people rely on. From nutrition assistance to direct support to agricultural producers, this funding is vital to supporting vulnerable citizens and rural America. However, as of May 8<sup>th</sup>, only \$7 billion, less than 20 percent, of the money provided has been obligated. This is unacceptable.

Particularly troubling is the delay in getting nutrition assistance out the door to address growing food insecurity across the country. Of the \$850 million we appropriated for The Emergency Food Assistance Program to provide critical resources to our nation's foodbanks, only \$117 million has been spent. Yet lines at foodbanks are growing and unemployment is surging. This money should be getting out to the people who need it, not stuck in Washington caught up in red tape. The Committee has also provided \$100 million for the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations and that money is still unspent. Child Nutrition Programs provide much needed nutrition for children, especially now when most schools are closed. Yet \$1 billion is still stuck at the department. Puerto Rico and the other U.S. territories are still waiting for the bulk of the funding we appropriated.

The Department requested some of the funding provided in these emergency spending bills because of the urgent needs you identified. And this Committee supported those requests. For example, you requested \$4 million for the Foreign Agricultural Service to help bring staff back to the United States from overseas posts. None of those funds have been spent. You requested \$3 million for the Farm Service Agency to assist the agency with increased farm loan demands. None of those funds have been spent. While these amounts are small, the fact that you asked for the funding, we provided it, and it still has not been obligated raises questions about the Department's ability to carry out its duties.

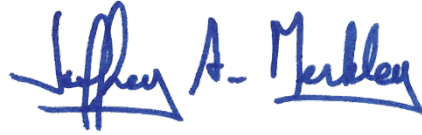
While we understand some programs are not set up to respond quickly to an emergency and they take time to process, these are extraordinary times and we need to do better than the status quo.

We stand ready to assist the department in any way we can to respond to this pandemic.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Patrick Leahy in blue ink.

Patrick Leahy  
Vice Chairman  
Senate Appropriations Committee

Handwritten signature of Jeffrey A. Merkley in blue ink.

Jeffrey A. Merkley  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Agriculture