



March 19, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C., 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

Thank you for the immediate attention the Administration has given to slowing the spread of COVID-19 and to maintaining a robust food supply. As a farmer led association representing the interests of wheat farmers nationwide, the National Association of Wheat Grower members would like to highlight potential supply chain, logistical, and trade-related impacts COVID-19 presents to not only our domestic economy but that of the world. During this time of uncertainty, the transportation and trade of agricultural commodities and input supplies are critical to maintaining a productive U.S. agricultural system, and workers and programs must be available to facilitate these activities.

The National Association of Wheat Growers (NAWG) is a federation of 20 state wheat grower associations that works to represent the needs and interests of wheat producers before Congress and federal agencies. Based in Washington, D.C., NAWG is grower-governed and grower-funded, and works in areas as diverse as federal farm policy, trade, environmental regulation, agricultural research and sustainability.

NAWG requests that the administration and leaders in Congress be mindful of the agriculture supply chain and coordinated functions of the federal and state governments that are essential to ensure we continue abundant domestic wheat production. The transport of critical production agriculture commodities and input supplies such as fertilizer, crop protection products, and seeds must continue domestically, through ports and across land borders. To ensure our continued ability to produce a safe and abundant food supply, there are critical government functions that need to be maintained and we need to ensure there is regulatory coordination between federal and state authorities, especially as there is ongoing closures of offices and restrictions placed on movement of individuals due to COVID-19 and the protection of human health. Additionally, as non-essential travel continues to be limited, we must ensure that U.S. grain and food can continue to be traded efficiently and effectively. While many of our customers are overseas, they continue to need access to our robust food production supply chain, from grain to food products, and that we keep our markets strong in a time of economic hardship. This includes the ability to transport our goods.

A few specific areas of note that should be kept in mind are pesticide applicator training and certification as well as access to farm labor and the processing of H2A visas. Grain inspections administered by the Federal Grain Inspection Service (FGIS) and delegated state agencies are also critical to facilitate the movement of grain for domestic consumption and for export. We're pleased that USDA has said the Department will take all steps necessary to ensure continued access to inspected products and we emphasize that this should be continued throughout this situation.

Further, there are ongoing concerns related to access to fertilizer; we think the U.S. Department of Transportation's emergency declaration on Friday, March 13, related to hours-of-service should be expanded to include fertilizer, agriculture production, and other supply chain services related to the production of agriculture. Additionally, as localities institute shelter in place orders or other stricter requirements, exclusions should be permitted for agriculture production where appropriate.

Lastly, continued farmer access to USDA programs and personnel is important, particularly as spring seeding gets underway, as farmers are signing up for disaster and other programs, and as sign-up deadlines loom. Of particular importance to farmers during this time are Farm Bill programs (commodities, conservation, and credit programs, including Market Assistance Loans and operating and ownership loans), crop insurance in anticipation of additional prevented planting acreage this year, disaster aid covering the past years' extreme weather events, and Market Facilitation Program assistance.

NAWG understands this is a rapidly developing and unique situation but stands ready to help and provide feedback as policy changes and relief programs are developed by the Administration and Congress. Please keep these thoughts and areas of concern in mind as relief efforts are formulated.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David J. Milligan".

David Milligan, President
National Association of Wheat Growers

CC: Leadership of the Senate and House Agriculture Committees