April 7, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Perdue:

On behalf of the farmer cooperative community, thank you for the incredible work being done to support American agriculture during the COVID-19 pandemic. We have seen severe impacts throughout the American economy, including production agriculture. Your steady hand guiding the response to protect our farmers and ranchers, while mitigating disruptions to the agricultural supply chain, is vital. We wanted to highlight the potential for economic losses as a direct result of COVID-19 for the specialty crops industry, including both fresh and processed fruits and vegetables alike.

Fruits and vegetables are an integral part of the recommended diet by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, and unfortunately one of the most under consumed categories. To help meet these nutritional needs, the DGA encourages consumption of all forms of fruits and vegetables: fresh, frozen, canned, and dried. Fruits and vegetables also are critical in supporting healthy immune systems, which is more important now as ever.

As such, we ask that a USDA response to the COVID-19 pandemic not distinguish between fresh and processed forms of the product in terms of economic assistance for the specialty crop sector. Instead, the focus should be on documented economic losses incurred regardless of the intended market.

Additionally, we ask funding for future food purchases destined for food banks, schools, and other emergency feeding programs be allocated based on recipient needs and avoid prioritizing specific products, which may not serve the needs of recipients in a cost-effective manner. To the extent feasible, stimulus funds for all feeding programs should be used to purchase American grown or raised food products.

Again, thank you for your steadfast work. We stand ready to work with you and your team on the process of estimating financial losses and impacts across the sector to ensure support is provided where needed. We can and will have a vibrant and robust U.S. agricultural industry long after we defeat this virus.

Sincerely,

Charles F. Conner
President & CEO

Representing the Business Interests of Agriculture