

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, DC 20510

April 23, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Perdue:

I write to you in regards to the Department of Agriculture's (USDA) efforts to assist the United States cranberry industry during the economic collapse caused by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. We ask you to provide direct, financial assistance to these essential farmers, as well as Section 32 purchases of surplus cranberry products including juice.<sup>1</sup> Importantly, as the impact of this emergency is fully felt in the months to come, we ask that you utilize all programs at USDA to assist.

Press reports have stated that, "Like many small businesses, farms could feel devastating effects of the pandemic" and that "farms and ranches that sell locally could see a decline in sales of as much as \$688.7 million."<sup>2</sup> Additionally, reports show that while the recently passed *Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act*<sup>3</sup> includes "\$9.5 billion for farmers," it is "up to the Department of Agriculture to distribute it among livestock producers, specialty crop producers and those who sell at farmers markets."<sup>4</sup>

Throughout the past decade, the price of cranberries has dropped approximately more than 50% due to overproduction.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, the industry has suffered from China's 40% tariff on some cranberry products in 2018.<sup>6</sup> In fact, news reports show that in Massachusetts, in the months before the pandemic, "A cranberry industry that was riding high only a few years ago

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<sup>1</sup> Congressional Research Service, "Farm and Food Support Under USDA's Section 32 Program," Jim Monke, October 17, 2016, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RL34081.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Washington Post, "Facing devastating losses, small farmers pivot to sell directly to consumers," Emily Heil, April 1, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/voraciously/wp/2020/04/01/facing-devastating-losses-small-farmers-pivot-to-sell-directly-to-consumers/>.

<sup>3</sup> Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, Public Law 116-136.

<sup>4</sup> Washington Post, "Facing devastating losses, small farmers pivot to sell directly to consumers," Emily Heil, April 1, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/voraciously/wp/2020/04/01/facing-devastating-losses-small-farmers-pivot-to-sell-directly-to-consumers/>.

<sup>5</sup> AP News, "Cranberry farmers want to build solar panels over their bogs," Philip Marcelo, October 30, 2019, <https://apnews.com/6bbb08841ba14027825f0c9992307203>; WBUR, "How The Trade War Crushed A Growing Chinese Market For U.S. Cranberries," Adrian Ma, September 16, 2019, <https://www.wbur.org/bostonmix/2019/09/16/china-america-cranberry-trade-impacts>.

<sup>6</sup> WBUR, "How The Trade War Crushed A Growing Chinese Market For U.S. Cranberries," Adrian Ma, September 16, 2019, <https://www.wbur.org/bostonmix/2019/09/16/china-america-cranberry-trade-impacts>.

is now being buffeted by an oversupply of fruit and the closure of some international markets amid a trade war. Many growers are losing money.”<sup>7</sup>

As of 2015, the value of Massachusetts’ cranberry industry was \$99.8 million and supported nearly 7,000 jobs.<sup>8</sup> While the COVID-19 pandemic continues to threaten jobs and local economies across the country, with some economist reportedly expecting that “by the end of the month, more than 20 million people will have been thrown out of work, pushing the unemployment rate toward 15 percent,”<sup>9</sup> it is critical that our cranberry growers have the resources they need to keep staff employed on local farms.

Given the recent economic hardships of the cranberry industry, particularly in Massachusetts, I urge you to take action to ensure that the USDA considers the unique and dire situation of cranberry growers in the administration’s economic response to COVID-19.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,

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Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator

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Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator

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Richard E. Neal  
Member of Congress

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James P. McGovern  
Member of Congress

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Stephen F. Lynch  
Member of Congress

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William Keating  
Member of Congress

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<sup>7</sup> Patriot Ledger, “South Shore cranberry growers buffeted by trade war, oversupply,” David Kindy, October 11, 2019, <https://www.patriotledger.com/news/20191011/south-shore-cranberry-growers-buffeted-by-trade-war-oversupply>.

<sup>8</sup> Boston Magazine, “The Cranberry Boom in Massachusetts, By the Numbers,” Chris Sweeney, October 27, 2015, <https://www.bostonmagazine.com/news/2015/10/27/cranberries/>.

<sup>9</sup> New York Times, “‘Sudden Black Hole’ for the Economy With Millions More Unemployed,” Patricia Cohen and Tiffany Hsu, April 10, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/09/business/economy/unemployment-claim-numbers-coronavirus.html>.

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Joseph P. Kennedy III  
Member of Congress

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Katherine Clark  
Member of Congress

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Lori Trahan  
Member of Congress