

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

May 22, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue  
Secretary  
United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)  
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We are extremely concerned with the list of specialty crops announced on May 19, 2020 as eligible for assistance under the USDA's Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP). With specialty crops making up 70 percent of Hawai'i's top agricultural commodities, those producers are amongst the hardest hit by the pandemic. Yet, USDA's list fails to include the majority of our state's specialty crops. Hawai'i's farmers need immediate relief, and we request that you expand eligibility to include specialty crops that make up our top twenty agricultural commodities. We urge you to also work with Farm Service Agency personnel in Hawai'i to recognize all specialty crops produced in our state as soon as possible.

The majority of Hawai'i's farms are diversified with specialty crops. Our state leads the U.S. in acres producing macadamia nut, papaya, passion fruit, taro, bananas, coffee, pineapple, and ginger root—and yet, from that list only papaya and taro are on the USDA's current list for relief. The most recent statistics for Hawai'i's top agricultural commodities from the National Agricultural Statistical Service (NASS) underscore this concern:

Commodity	Value of Production (millions)	Specialty Crop Status
Seed Crops	\$120.8	
Macadamia Nuts	\$53.9	YES
Cattle	\$43.891	
Coffee	\$43.774	YES
Other Aquaculture	\$41.177	
Algae	\$35.19	
Landscape Plant Material	\$22.354	YES
Papayas	\$9.4	YES
Milk	\$9.214	
Lettuce	\$8.705	YES
Bananas	\$6.028	YES
Palms, potted	\$4.607	YES
Plant Rentals	\$3.44	
Dendrobiums, potted	\$3.24	YES
Sweet Potatoes	\$3.12	YES

Anthurium	\$2.892	YES
Honey	\$2.374	YES
Dry Onions	\$2.080	YES
Cabbage, Chinese	\$1.725	YES
Ginger Root	\$1.7	YES

While a handful of specialty crops from this list are currently on the USDA's list of specialty crops immediately eligible for relief under CFAP, the specialty crops that are currently omitted leave a large number of Hawai'i's farmers either waiting and hoping to be included in the list of eligible specialty crops, or in the same category as wheat, soy, corn, and other row crops. Furthermore, crops currently left off the list, like bananas and ginger, are locally consumed and contribute to our food security. Failing to provide these producers with relief may force them to pivot to export crops and decrease our local food production. We appreciate that USDA is working to gather information from industries to assess the possibility of including additional specialty crops as eligible at a later date. However, impacts to farmers in Hawai'i began months ago and timing of assistance is critical to keep our farmers in production.

Hawai'i's economy has been exceptionally hard hit during the pandemic because of the state's dependence on the hospitality industry and visitor spending. The University of Hawai'i Economic Research Organization (UHERO) projected real visitor spending to decline by 17 percent in the second quarter, but the actual impacts could easily exceed the forecast. For example, the *Honolulu Star Advertiser* reported that visitor arrivals and associated visitor spending were down nearly 54 percent and 52 percent, respectively, from March last year.

The pandemic has had severe impacts on the state's agricultural producers, but it is difficult to provide definitive statistics at this time. On April 27, UHERO published data from a survey of 623 businesses statewide, and reported the following figures for agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting: a 21 percent loss in agricultural jobs from January to April of this year, causing a 17 percent loss in revenue. According to the Hawai'i Department of Labor and Industrial Relations, to date over 238,000 unemployment claims, representing roughly 34 percent of the total workforce, have been filed since March 1.

The severe economic impacts from the pandemic have left Hawai'i's farmers in dire need of

financial assistance to remain in production, and we request your leadership and assistance in providing them much needed immediate relief.

Sincerely,



BRIAN SCHATZ  
United States Senator



MAZIE K. HIRONO  
United States Senator



TULSI GABBARD  
Member of Congress



ED CASE  
Member of Congress