

Rep. Ron Kind, members of the Wisconsin Congressional Delegation: Call on Secretary Perdue to provide answers for Wisconsin's Dairyland

Posted on Wednesday, Jun 3, 2020

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La Crosse, WI— Yesterday, **Reps. Ron Kind (WI-03), Gwen Moore (WI-04), Mark Pocan (WI-02)** and **Sen. Tammy Baldwin (WI)** sent a letter to Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Sonny Perdue pressing for answers on how contracts are awarded through USDA's Farmers to Families Food Box Program. In May, USDA announced it was awarding \$1.2 billion in contracts out of the \$3 billion program, which is meant to support farmers struggling with food supply chain disruptions by purchasing agricultural products to distribute to those in need. However, USDA has released few details regarding the awardees and the process used to determine which companies receive contracts.

Wisconsin—one of the nation's top dairy producing states and home to well established dairy producers, processors, and distributors—has received less than 1% of the contracts made for dairy products through the program. Further, many contracts have been awarded to companies with little experience who are at risk of being unable to fulfill their obligations, with many food banks reporting far fewer food boxes than expected. The COVID-19 pandemic has continued to threaten Wisconsin's agricultural economy, with some dairy farmers being forced to dispose of thousands of gallons of fresh milk daily due to a drop in demand for dairy products, and now Wisconsin farmers have been seemingly shut out of the USDA program meant to help with this very issue.

"It's baffling and unacceptable America's Dairyland could receive less than 1% of the awards for dairy products through the Farmers to Families Food Box Program,"

said **Rep. Ron Kind**. “With COVID-19 causing considerable economic damage to family farmers across Wisconsin, USDA must provide clear answers on where funding through this program is going and how decisions are being made on which companies receive awards moving forwards. Our dairy farmers are the heart of our rural communities, and they deserve additional clarity and more support from USDA.”

“The USDA has a lot of explaining to do about why inexperienced and poor performing contractors in other states have been awarded contracts while qualified partners in Wisconsin have been left behind. Wisconsin dairy producers, processors, and distributors, working together with the Hunger Taskforce and Wisconsin’s Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection are ready, willing and able to effectively meet the challenges we face. The Trump Administration simply needs to do more to support family farms, food assistance organizations, and families in need in Wisconsin. We have proven partnerships in Wisconsin to address food insecurity and we need the USDA to join us with support,” said **Sen. Tammy Baldwin**.

“The Farmers to Families Food Box Program aimed to address our food surplus while helping meet the needs of Americans struggling to put food on the table. That’s why I am disappointed and seriously concerned about the program’s implementation, especially with the way that contracts have been awarded to companies with little or no experience, while other more experienced organizations were overlooked. I am pleased to join my colleagues in pressing the USDA to shine more light on its decisions and to ensure that any future contracts are awarded to companies equipped with the experience and tools to help the millions of Americans struggling with food insecurity in our country. I will continue fighting for those Wisconsin organizations that I think are well equipped to partner with this to meet the needs of Wisconsinites during these trying times,” said **Rep. Gwen Moore**.

“Once again the Trump administration’s lack of transparency around where federal funding is going is threatening to harm those who need supplies the most,” said **Rep. Mark Pocan**. “We need more information about which companies are being awarded funds from the USDA’s Farmer to Families Food Box Program. Despite the number of dairy farmers in Wisconsin ready to supply hungry families, less than 1% of dairy product awards went to Wisconsin farmers. This administration should be looking for every opportunity to feed families in America, but clearly it has its own private priorities—we want public answers.”

“Had the USDA followed its longstanding rule of allocating funds according to the “Fair Share” (50% unemployment/50%poverty) the State of Wisconsin should have received \$44million in funds. Instead it received \$9million. Hunger Task Force, Wisconsin’s anti-hunger leader, with 46 years-experience applied for \$37million in funds to purchase food from Wisconsin based businesses, producers and most importantly farms and farm cooperatives. With a network of 81 recipient organizations, including 9 Tribal Nations, poised to receive these foods from Ashland to Kenosha, Wisconsin’s hungry were ignored when our application was denied,” said **Sherrie Tussler, executive director of the Hunger Task Force.**

Specifically, Kind and members of the Wisconsin delegation are asking the USDA to:

- Increase transparency by releasing details on the companies awarded contracts, including the companies’ physical addresses, legal names, and full contract information.
- Provide a written explanation and opportunity for recourse for organizations that were denied contracts, particularly those that already have demonstrated a record of success in similar programs and have an existing relationship with USDA.
- Ensure the remaining \$1.8 billion of the \$3 billion Farmers to Families Food Box Program is distributed fairly by providing information on plans moving forward.

The full letter to USDA is available [here](#).