

U.S. Sen. Baldwin, Bipartisan Colleagues: Urge Administration to ensure continuity of food supply by supporting farmers during coronavirus pandemic

Posted on Monday, Apr 6, 2020

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) and a bipartisan group of her Senate colleagues, led by Senators Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) and John Hoeven (R-ND), are urging the administration to ensure the continuity of our country's food supply and to support rural areas during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic by providing needed relief to farmers.

"We write to ask that you take action to ensure the continuity of our country's food supply and support rural areas during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic by providing needed relief to farmers—including by ensuring that the temporary flexibilities on farm loans recently announced by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) are made permanent for the duration of the pandemic and subsequent economic recovery, and also by ensuring adequate and equitable access to credit during this period of market uncertainty," **the Senators wrote to Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue.**

"Americans always depend on our nation's farmers to grow the food, fuel, and fiber that we all need, but that reliance becomes much more pronounced in times of

crisis," **the Senators continued.**

"To provide additional support for those whose operations are being affected by the coronavirus, we urge you to consider making emergency measures such as deadline extensions, loan payment deferrals, payment forbearance, and a full suspension of all current and pending foreclosure actions effective for the duration of the pandemic and subsequent economic recovery."

"Such measures are critical to avoiding disruption in the country's food supply chain."

In addition to Baldwin, Klobuchar, and Hoeven, the letter was signed by Senators Tina Smith (D-MN), Kevin Cramer (R-ND), Bob Casey (D-PA), John Thune (R-SD), Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Steve Daines (R-MT), Dick Durbin (D-IL), John Barrasso (R-WY), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-MS), Mike Enzi (R-WY), John Boozman (R-AR), Michael Bennet (D-CO), Jerry Moran (R-KS), Mike Rounds (R-SD), Angus King (I-ME), Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), Thom Tillis (R-NC), Bill Cassidy (R-LA), Mark Warner (D-VA), Todd Young (R-IN), Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Brian Schatz (D-HI), Patty Murray (D-WA), Doug Jones (D-AL), Deb Fischer (R-NE), Tom Carper (D-DE), Tom Cotton (R-AR), Gary Peters (D-MI), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Jon Tester (D-MT), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Cory Gardner (R-CO), Jim Inhofe (R-OK), Martha McSally (R-AZ), Josh Hawley (R-MO), John Cornyn (R-TX), and Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH).

The full letter is available [here](#) and below. An online version of this release is available [here](#).

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We write to ask that you take action to ensure the continuity of our country's food supply and support rural areas during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic by providing needed relief to farmers—including by ensuring that the temporary flexibilities on farm loans recently announced by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) are made permanent for the duration of the pandemic and subsequent economic recovery, and also by ensuring adequate and equitable access to credit during this period of market uncertainty.

As you know, farmers across the country have faced many challenges in the past several years. The coronavirus pandemic is now causing additional disruptions, driving further declines in market conditions, prices, and export demand, and some experts believe that the consequences of the pandemic could hit rural communities particularly hard. In the past week alone, cattle producers have seen excessive price losses and corn growers have seen biofuel producers suspend purchases due to weaker fuel demand. These conditions have created cash flow challenges as spring planting season quickly approaches.

Americans always depend on our nation's farmers to grow the food, fuel, and fiber that we all need, but that reliance becomes much more pronounced in times of crisis. We appreciate the Department's recognition of the challenges facing farmers and the announcement made by FSA on March 26, 2020, to provide flexibility for those repaying farm loans. These actions will help alleviate cash flow concerns as producers make important business decisions for their operations. We respectfully ask that you provide us with additional information as to how the Department plans to communicate these flexibilities to producers, the criteria that the Department will consider when determining whether a producer receives temporary payment deferral or forbearance, and how long these extensions will be in effect for producers responding to loan servicing actions.

To provide additional support for those whose operations are being affected by the coronavirus, we urge you to consider making emergency measures such as

deadline extensions, loan payment deferrals, payment forbearance, and a full suspension of all current and pending foreclosure actions effective for the duration of the pandemic and subsequent economic recovery. The Department should also consider taking additional emergency actions – including the authorization of loan restructuring and loan balance write-downs – that were not included in the March 26 announcement. Such measures are critical to avoiding disruption in the country's food supply chain.

We also urge you to prioritize and fully leverage existing programs at the Department that are well suited to resolving loan and credit impacts as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the Agricultural Mediation Program. This existing federal-state partnership has a proven track record of providing confidential and neutral forums to discuss and resolve loan and credit issues between farmers and their lenders. The program's caseloads have steadily risen over the past eight years and can be expected to increase as the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic ripple through the rural economy.

We will continue working to provide for additional support for farmers and rural communities to address the ongoing effects of the coronavirus pandemic. In the meantime, we urge you to consider actions that will provide flexibility and temporary relief for borrowers and ensure adequate and equitable access to credit.

Thank you for your continued work on behalf of American farmers and ranchers. We stand ready and willing to work with you to help get farmers through these extraordinary circumstances.