

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

May 22, 2020

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

*Via electronic correspondence.*

Dear Secretary Perdue,

We write to express appreciation for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) leadership in efforts to sustain and promote U.S. agriculture production during the COVID-19 pandemic and to urgently request the inclusion of America's beekeepers and honey producers in the USDA's economic relief efforts.

Bees are vital to U.S. agriculture and the American food supply. The Natural Resources Conservation Service estimates that bees pollinate 35 percent of all crops.<sup>1</sup> About one-third of the food eaten by Americans comes from crops pollinated by honey bees—including apples, oranges, squash, broccoli, and almonds.<sup>2</sup> Bee pollination accounts for about \$15 billion in added crop value, according to the USDA. This crop value is in addition to bees' honey and beeswax production.

Before the COVID-19 outbreak, habitats and beehives already faced many threats, including viruses, parasites, and Colony Collapse Disease. The pandemic has only increased this vulnerability. For example, disruptions to the nation's transportation system have resulted in the beekeeping industry's growing inability to move hives to those sites in need of pollination, procure essential beehive elements, such as queens, and limited the movement of products such as honey.

In addition to these difficulties, the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) confirmed reports of the Asian giant hornet, *Vespa mandarinia*, in the continental U.S. in December 2019.<sup>3</sup> While this hornet has yet to establish itself and is not an immediate threat, its arrival certainly has profound implications for honeybee populations, as Asian giant hornets seek out and destroy beehives and can kill an entire hive in hours.<sup>3</sup> We must protect our pollinator populations and our nation's ecosystems from almost certain disruption by these hornets, and the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) must monitor and support efforts to prevent the introduction and spread of Asian giant hornets in the U.S.

1. "Insects & Pollinators." US Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, accessed May 15, 2020, <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/plantsanimals/pollinate/>.

2. "Helping Agriculture's Helpful Honey Bees." US Food and Drug Administration, July 30, 2018, <https://www.fda.gov/animal-veterinary/animal-health-literacy/helping-agricultures-helpful-honey-bees>.

3. "Asian giant hornet." Washington State Department of Agriculture, Department of Insects, Pests, and Weeds, accessed May 15, 2020, <https://agr.wa.gov/departments/insects-pests-and-weeds/insects/hornets>.

Beekeepers and honey producers in states like Florida and Illinois have shown us their dedication to contributing to the nation's food supply chain as they continue working during the health and economic crisis. But these businesses, like many others, are struggling to adapt to the rapid changes in the market due to the pandemic, including shifting market demand and direct-to-consumer sales. Without federal assistance, fewer domestic bee colonies will be available for pollination and production of goods, and America will be forced to rely on foreign supplements from countries like China and Argentina, potentially opening the nation up to more invasive species, as well as food supply insecurity due to trade wars.

Honey producers are a vital part of our agriculture sector and, in order to survive the current economic realities wrought by the spread of COVID-19, need to be included in the recently announced Coronavirus Farm Assistance Program (CFAP). In addition, the USDA should consider purchasing honey to include in federal nutrition assistance programs to distribute to families in need. Direct funding and utilization of USDA's purchasing authority has been afforded to other agricultural products experiencing similar challenges, and beekeepers' products and contribution to the American food basket's pollination certainly establishes them as eligible for the same economic relief.

We urge you to use the funds Congress provided in the *Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act* to help honey producers and pollinators make it through this crisis so they may continue to support the work of our nation's farmers.

Thank you for your full and fair consideration of our request, consistent with applicable statutes and regulations, we stand ready to assist in ensuring our nation's food supply remains secure during these uncertain times.

Sincerely,



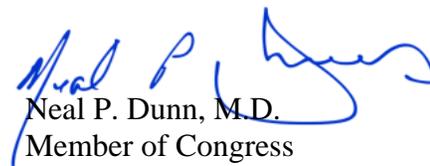
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Member of Congress



Rodney Davis  
Member of Congress



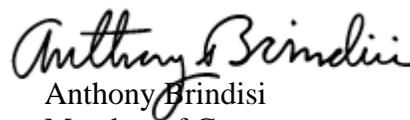
Doug LaMalfa  
Member of Congress



Neal P. Dunn, M.D.  
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Rick Crawford  
Member of Congress



Anthony Brindisi  
Member of Congress



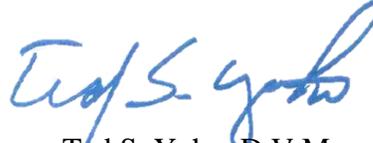
TJ Cox  
Member of Congress



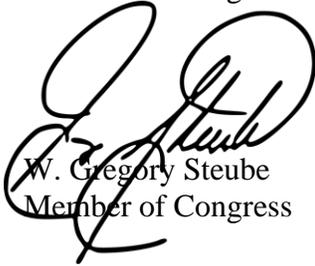
Peter DeFazio  
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Kim Schrier, M.D.  
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Member of Congress



W. Gregory Steube  
Member of Congress



Steven Cohen  
Member of Congress

Cc: Administrator Richard Fordyce  
USDA Farm Service Agency  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20250