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Midwest Family Farm Groups Want Aid to Get to People, Not Global Agribusiness

Groups Concerned That Trump's USDA Will Continue to Favor Industry

Family farm based organizations in Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri and South Dakota sent a letter to Congress today calling for strong oversight of the recently passed COVID-19 aid package to ensure the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) disburses aid to people and rural communities, not global agribusiness firms that reaped tens of millions of dollars from recent trade-aid payments.

In the letter, the Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment (CFFE) urged Congress to set up guardrails for USDA regarding a total of \$24 billion in aid designed to support farmers hurt by the enormous disruption in markets and supply chains caused by the COVID-19 outbreak. Specifically, CFFE called for: no public money to go to new or expanding confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs), which have flooded the market, driving farmers' prices for livestock and milk down while polluting rural waterways; a prohibition on multinational agribusiness firms from receiving aid; and adequate resources for farmers supplying local markets that have disappeared.

"Family farmers and communities in rural Missouri and rural America are stressed to the max," said Darvin Bentlage, cattle and grain farmer from Southwest Missouri. "We need help, and Secretary Perdue has a moral imperative to direct public stimulus funds to family farms and businesses on our rural Main Streets. He should pretty much do the opposite of what he did in the Market Facilitation Program where millions and millions were given away to corporate and foreign agribusiness and factory farm corporations."

"This crisis will produce more bailouts and more policy initiatives," said Darrel Mosel, a grain-livestock farmer and Land Stewardship Project member from Central Minnesota. "The focus needs to be on long-term positive changes to our farming system, like support for local and regional food systems. But a blank checkbook approach for the rest of that money is a path towards more of the same — decimated rural communities, dirty water and a food system controlled by fewer and fewer players."

As Congress considers a new stimulus package, CFFE pointed to the urgent need to address structural failures in agricultural markets that prevent farmers from making a fair living. CFFE highlighted the need for a two-year suspension of loan payments; a halt on loans for new or expanding CAFOs; a moratorium on new agribusiness and food industry mergers; stronger fair market practices rules; enabling access to safety net programs for farms and small food businesses; and mandatory Country of Origin Labeling (COOL).

“Corporations do not need a bailout right now. Family-scale farmers and ranchers that produce for regional communities need assistance,” said Stephanie Peterson, Dakota Rural Action Board member and owner of Fruit of the Coop in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. “This current crisis has highlighted, more than anything, the need to reduce our dependence on large corporate food distribution systems. We should be focusing on local and regional food operations and supporting our local producers and consumers during this time of hardship and upheaval. How can we be more resilient as a community? One of those ways is to get to know the folks producing our food and buy directly from them.”

“On top of not getting a fair price for what they produce, family farmers are now dealing with the impacts of a global health pandemic. When farmers are forced to keep producing to try to get by, the factory farm industry benefits from the cheap grain prices,” said Larry Ginter, a family farmer and Iowa CCI member from Rhodes, Iowa. “Just like we don’t need to produce cheap grain for the factory farm industry, we don’t need to bail out this corporate controlled industry. USDA dollars must go to independent family farmers, not factory farms.”

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

The Campaign for Family Farms & the Environment (CFFE) is composed of the [Missouri Rural Crisis Center](#), [Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement](#), [Dakota Rural Action](#), [Land Stewardship Project](#), [Food & Water Watch](#), and the [Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy](#).

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