

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 30, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Perdue,

We write to express concern about the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)'s handling of the transition between vendors for the Coronavirus Food Assistant Program's Farmers to Families Food Boxes (CFAP). This program has been critical in feeding those who are facing food insecurity. However, in the transition between the CFAP vendors selected for rounds two and three, miscommunication from USDA has left many food pantries in New York City suddenly without food, causing upheaval in the lives of those families who were relying on their local pantries for meals.

We understand that the new vendors selected for round three of this program were required to specify the counties or boroughs to which they would provide food. However, this has forced many non-profits and food pantries who had relationships with vendors no longer serving their county or borough to scramble to find new partnerships, with no guidance from USDA, no overlap in service provision, and nowhere to turn for help.

Further, it is our understanding that many vendors applied for round three contracts with preexisting relationships with food pantries in the regions they will serve. This means that those who have lost their non-profit partners have been forced to identify their new vendors after their old partnerships have been cut, again without any guidance from USDA. In a city as diverse as New York, food pantries often serve specific cultural or religious communities. If new vendors are simply providing food to those pantries that they already have relationships with, we can be sure that whole communities in our city will remain underserved.

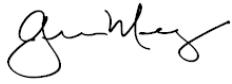
It has also come to our attention that each Farmers to Families box will now include a signed letter from President Trump. Using federal programs that feed hungry families during a national crisis to pursue a political agenda is unacceptable and egregious. We urge you to immediately cease adding these letters to CFAP boxes.

Finally, while we have already expressed this concern in an unacknowledged letter to you dated August 28th, every vendor that was selected for round three will be providing mixed meat/dairy/produce boxes. This eliminates the participation of kosher pantries, who often serve both kosher and halal communities. To fail to provide for these pantries in the midst of the Jewish High Holidays is particularly shocking and has resulted in Jewish families across the city unable to access food during their most holy season.

Our city's food pantries have reported an over 600% increase in need as compared to months before the pandemic; hungry families are desperate. We urge you to immediately ensure that round three CFAP vendors are proactively reaching out to food pantries who can no longer work with their former partners; to clearly explain to food pantries who their new vendor is; and to provide produce-only boxes to kosher pantries.

We urgently await a response to this letter.

Sincerely,



Grace Meng
Member of Congress

/s/ Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

/s/ Gregory W. Meeks
Member of Congress

/s/ Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress

/s/ Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress

/s/ Eliot L. Engel
Member of Congress

/s/ Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress

/s/ Max Rose
Member of Congress

/s/ Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress

/s/ Hakeem Jeffries
Member of Congress

/s/ Carolyn B. Maloney
Member of Congress

/s/ Thomas R. Suozzi
Member of Congress

/s/ José E. Serrano
Member of Congress

/s/ Kathleen M. Rice
Member of Congress

/s/ Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress