

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 21, 2019

The Honorable Sonny Perdue, Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We are writing regarding indications that the U.S. Department of Agriculture is planning a second round of assistance for farmers, ranchers, and producers affected by the trade dispute with China. The retaliatory tariffs and market volatility that followed could not have come at a worse time for our agricultural producers who are reeling from a nearly fifty percent decline in net farm income since 2013.

Let us be clear, our constituents are hurting, and not only from the unjustified tariffs imposed by China. Our producers are eating through their equity and having to take on more debt. Weather conditions ranging from drought to floods and waterlogged soils have prevented seeds from being put in the ground and left crops unharvested. Our export markets have shrunk. The daily news of ongoing trade negotiations with China only adds to what is already a hardy way of life.

We supported our farmers with the enactment of the 2018 Farm Bill which, while not perfect, is the toolbox the agriculture sector uses to provide certainty. It includes vital risk management tools like crop insurance and strong farm programs found in Title I of the bill. The Farm Bill provides a solid safety net for not only our producers but their lenders. However, one aspect that a Farm Bill cannot address is a trade war between the two largest economies in the world. Especially one in which farmers are taking it on the chin.

We support the President countering China's unfair trade practices and government-subsidized industries. While we do not believe the government should be in the business of dictating agricultural decisions, we also believe that our government must continue to stand strong with agriculture. What our farmers truly need are markets. Ultimately, a resolution to the dispute with China is the only thing that will allow our farmers to get back on their feet.

The first trade mitigation package made the difference for many farmers and ranchers to keep going. Today's agricultural economy and ongoing trade war is not simple, and any trade mitigation package you and your team develop will require thorough and thoughtful deliberation. You stand at the forefront of blunting the negative effect of these tariffs, but the voices of our farmers must be heard and accounted for. As you develop a second package, we encourage you to consider the requests and feedback of our agricultural producers.

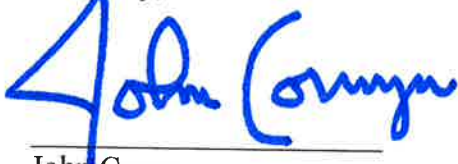
Over the past few months, we have heard from diverse agricultural interests in our states about their needs and desires should a second round of assistance come to fruition. Their hard work and intentions are true. Their proposals are valid.

The concerns relayed to us vary in size and scope. They include accounting for the size of the farm and operation; cross-commodity effects; prevented planting of crops; alternative methods of harvesting; adverse weather and market conditions; electing the use of varying data sources for historical price, yield, production, and acreage; commodity by-products; the secondary effects of trade retaliation on agricultural inputs, outputs, and the farm safety net; and providing equitable assistance in past and future packages. It is important that any program that is announced must not distort 2019 planting decisions. To prevent that, nearly every stakeholder has asked that you consider using historical numbers.

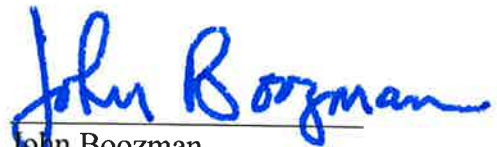
As elected representatives, it is our job to ensure their voices are heard. Additionally, Congress's power under Article I of the Constitution may be required should you proceed with a second round of assistance. We kindly ask that you listen and incorporate our farmers' views into your next package of assistance. Lastly, we urge you to remain in communication with us and our staff as you finalize your plans.

Thank you for your steadfast support of agriculture and rural America.

Sincerely,



John Cornyn
United States Senator



John Boozman
United States Senator



Cindy Hyde-Smith
United States Senator



Bill Cassidy, M.D.
United States Senator



Johnny Isakson
United States Senator