

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

February 24th, 2021

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

Congratulations on your recent confirmation as Secretary of Agriculture. We look forward to working with you on issues that are important to Iowa. We write to bring your attention to the exclusion of custom cattle feeders in the Corona virus Food Assistance Program (CFAP).

On January 15, 2021, former Secretary Perdue announced the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) would provide additional assistance through CFAP, specifically by expanding eligibility for certain producers and updating payments to compensate producers that had previously applied to the program.

While we appreciate USDA's commitment to assisting much of the beef cattle industry, it's been brought to our attention that USDA did not include assistance for custom cattle feeders. Custom feeding is an important part of Iowa's cattle industry. Custom cattle feeders provide services including: yardage, feed, health services, marketing, and more for livestock that are owned by someone else. In Iowa, nearly all custom feedyards are owned and operated by farm families. Many of these custom cattle feeders have been unable to conduct business as usual due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with yards sitting empty or at low capacity. As a result, custom cattle feeders are losing revenue and Iowans are suffering. Simply put, the plight of custom cattle feeders in Iowa is very similar to those in the swine and poultry sectors.

USDA has set precedent regarding eligibility for payment. In order for swine or poultry contract growers to be eligible for payment, they must demonstrate a decrease in revenue between 2019 and 2020. Furthermore, they must prove they are not entitled to a share from sales proceeds of the commodity. Custom cattle feeders could easily meet both eligibility requirements.

To assist custom cattle feeders during this difficult time, we request that USDA include custom cattle feeders as part of any upcoming assistance plans. In light of the recent announcement on January 27, 2021 by USDA to freeze CFAP payments, we find this issue timely and relevant.

Thank you for your dedicated service and support of the beef cattle industry. We appreciate your attention on this matter.

Respectfully,

Charles Grassley
United States Senator

Joni Ernst
United States Senator

Cindy Axne
Member of Congress

Randy Feenstra
Member of Congress

Ashley Hinson
Member of Congress

Mariannette Miller-Meeks
Member of Congress