

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

May 11, 2020

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

The Honorable Michael Pompeo  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, D.C. 20230

The Honorable John Barsa  
Acting Administrator  
U.S. Agency for International Development  
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20004

Dear Secretary Perdue, Secretary Pompeo, and Administrator Barsa:

We write to request your continued leadership and partnership to mitigate the global hunger implications of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the face of this public health emergency, funding must be available to international humanitarian organizations working to prevent widespread hunger and steps must be taken to ensure international agricultural trade remains free and open. Our government can make this happen by fully utilizing global food aid programs and leveraging the bounty of American farmers.

From the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, food security experts have warned that this health emergency could quickly become a hunger emergency. That, unfortunately, is becoming reality. Over the past month, we have seen our own domestic food supply chain under tremendous stress, with food dumped and wasted while lines grow outside of food banks. Thankfully, our nation's food system is resilient. Food supply chains will retool, and local, state and federal governments and civil society will step in to protect people in the interim.

As the virus spreads to the developing world, however, we are learning of startling food security impacts in places where people are not so fortunate. On April 21, 2020, numerous leaders in the international humanitarian and development community released the *Global Report on Food Crises*, an annual snapshot of the number of acutely hungry people around the world. The report demonstrates that, even prior to COVID-19, the number of people living in crisis levels of food security or above had increased in 2019 to 135 million people across 55 countries.<sup>1</sup> This number

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<sup>1</sup> Food Security Information Network & Global Network Against Food Crises, "2020 Global Report on Food Crises: Joint Analysis for Better Decisions," [https://www.fsinplatform.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/GRFC\\_2020\\_ONLINE\\_200420.pdf](https://www.fsinplatform.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/GRFC_2020_ONLINE_200420.pdf).

is up almost 70 percent in just four years, driven by a rise in conflict and climate-related extreme events. Complementary analysis by the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) shows that an additional 130 million people could be pushed to the brink of starvation by COVID-19 this year if urgent steps are not taken.<sup>2</sup>

Fortunately, the United States is well poised to respond. For more than half a century, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Office of Food for Peace has delivered lifesaving assistance to more than four billion people around the world. We will need our food assistance programs now more than ever before. Time is of the essence, and every effort should be made to swiftly move funding to implementing organizations to prevent the worst COVID-19 impacts.

American farmers have long played a central role in our food aid programs, sharing their harvests to feed the hungry and securing economic and national security gains for the United States along the way. In 2019, USAID's Office of Food for Peace purchased and shipped more than 1.5 million metric tons of American-grown commodities to dozens of countries around the world.<sup>3</sup> At a time when farmers are facing low farm gate prices and tremendous surpluses, these programs can help both at home and abroad.

As a world leader in agricultural production and trade, we must remain steadfast in our resolve to keep U.S. agricultural markets free and open, especially as dozens of countries around the world consider counterproductive export restrictions and other dangerous measures. In order to avoid a global food price crisis similar to what we saw a decade ago, we must quickly move food to the locations where it is most needed. This type of swift movement relies on fully-functioning agricultural markets.

The COVID-19 pandemic threatens global food security in a way that we have not seen since the Second World War, or perhaps ever before. Just as we did then, the United States must rise to the occasion to prevent this hunger emergency from becoming a threat to global stability. As our nation works to meet this goal, we look forward to working with you to make full use of our international food assistance programs and keep communities around the world food secure during this pandemic and in the long-term.

Sincerely,



Jimmy Panetta  
Member of Congress



Glenn 'GT' Thompson  
Member of Congress

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<sup>2</sup> United Nations World Food Programme, "COVID-19 Will Double the Number of People Facing Food Crises Unless Swift Action Is Taken," April 21, 2020, <https://www.wfp.org/news/covid-19-will-double-number-people-facing-food-crises-unless-swift-actions-taken>.

<sup>3</sup> United States Agency for International Development (USAID), "Food For Peace Fiscal Year 2019 Fact Sheet," (Last Updated January 14, 2020), <https://www.usaid.gov/ffp-2019-fact-sheet>.