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U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Agriculture
Subcommittee on Livestock and
Foreign Agriculture
Room 1301, Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-6001

(202) 225-2171

April 24, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Perdue:

It is out of concern that I write after reading the tragic media reports of a second USDA meat inspector passing away due to COVID-19 and learning that more than 130 other inspectors have contracted the virus. As Chairman of the U.S. House Subcommittee on Livestock and Foreign Agriculture, I am committed to working with you to do everything we can to support the health and safety of the 8,000 USDA meat and poultry inspectors.

Our frontline food and agriculture workers, including inspectors, farmers, farm workers, and plant and supply chain workers, are critical to the health, safety, and security of our country. We know without healthy inspectors and workers, plants cannot operate, farmers have no place to market their animals, and consumers miss out on affordable and safe food. We must do everything we can to protect those frontline workers during this public health emergency.

We share the goal of keeping USDA employees and all frontline workers safe, but I am troubled by the directive issued on April 9, 2020, requiring Federal inspectors to find or make their own masks and face coverings. Shortages of personal protective equipment are well known and given the Vice President's April 16th public pledge to ensure every frontline food worker has a mask, I hope this directive is no longer needed.

Please keep me regularly updated as we work together through this difficult situation to keep our inspectors safe, our frontline workers well, and our food supply secure.

Sincerely,



Jim Costa
Member of Congress

CC: The Honorable Mindy Brashears, Under Secretary for Food Safety, U.S. Department of Agriculture