

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

August 30, 2021

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack  
Secretary  
United States Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

As Congress approaches another attempt at reconciliation, the House and Senate Agriculture Committees write to better understand the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA, Department) work to implement the previously funded pandemic-related provisions, as well as policies and funding enacted under P.L. 117-2 (American Rescue Plan Act, ARPA). We remain concerned with the absence of public testimony from the Department on the status and posture of these prior measures, and the lack of congressional oversight to properly evaluate future measures contemplated under the Democrats' second budget resolution. These concerns include, but are not limited to, the following:

- The Department has appeared to focus its outreach, resources, and effort on nutrition-related aid, subsequently pushing the farm bill baseline to an excess of \$1 trillion. The pace by which producer aid has been disseminated is erratic at best, and without comparable priority.
- Prior to enactment of P.L. 117-2, multiple data inquiries related to previous COVID-related spending have gone unanswered by the Department. For example, letters dated February 5 and May 19 sought to understand the additional needs unmet by all previous aid, as well as the data used by the Department to inform administrative decisions and claims related to the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program. Without responses to these basic oversight requests, questions remain concerning the Department's plan to assess and execute producer aid in a more timely, concerted effort.
- P.L. 117-2 included debt relief to socially disadvantaged farmers, a program that remains in limbo due to multiple legal challenges resulting in a nationwide injunction because of provisions that were hastily drafted and constitutionally suspect. While we have been cut out of any process to address the embattled statute in the upcoming reconciliation package, we encourage greater forethought than was afforded the program developed under the ARPA.

Despite trillions in federal spending related to COVID and hundreds of billions more being dedicated to non-COVID related programs, U.S. farmers, ranchers, foresters, and rural communities remain vulnerable to the impacts of the pandemic and volatile inflation. As we work to assess and understand the needs of production agriculture and the countless communities impacted by USDA programs, discourse on the Department's views on the implementation and execution of prior and future legislation remains critical. We invite you to meet with us to

discuss these questions, and others, that deserve answers before our committees are forced to plunge ahead into another reconciliation process.

Please respond to this letter by September 3, 2021 to ensure this request can be accommodated.

Sincerely,



John Boozman  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry



Glenn 'GT' Thompson  
Republican Leader  
House Committee on Agriculture