

United States Senate

June 28, 2022

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

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

As you work to implement \$1.5 billion in food distribution and market access programs, we urge you to prioritize investments in agricultural producers who have experienced substantial losses due to shipping delays. Specifically, we urge you to support commodity purchases for specialty crops, quality loss assistance, and cold storage at food banks and distribution hubs. These investments would make a real difference in mitigating agricultural producers' financial losses and preventing similar disasters in the future.

As you know, our nation's food distribution system has been strained since the onset of the pandemic. For example, the cost to ship containers has increased dramatically, in some cases by nearly 1,000 percent. These challenges have had disastrous consequences for many producers, especially those growing perishable crops. The California agricultural industry lost \$2.1 billion in exports between May and September 2021 alone, and experimental solutions like "pop-up" terminals have not yet alleviated the congestion. As a result, billions of pounds of healthy food are now sitting in storage and rapidly losing commercial and nutritional value. As farmers prepare for the next planting season, these financial losses on top of increased input costs will further exacerbate difficulties for producers.

USDA investments in agricultural producers who have experienced substantial losses due to shipping delays would help deliver products to market at home and abroad, thereby providing consumers with healthier food options, stimulating the economies of rural communities, and ensuring our nation does its part to support global food security. We also encourage you to ensure that grantees retain their workforce and benefits provided to them, as these workers are the backbone of the agriculture industry. Thank you for your consideration of our request and for your focus on improving our domestic food supply and nutrition assistance programs.

Sincerely,



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Alex Padilla
United States Senator