March 16, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Perdue,

It has been a challenging few years for U.S. cattle producers. Trade disruptions and market volatility issues have undercut producers at every turn. We appreciate your continued efforts and attention to the ongoing struggles faced by U.S. cattle producers.

You are well aware of the vast commodity crashes across the board as markets react to the Coronavirus and its impact on everyday life. The cattle market was on track to recover following the fire at the Tyson Foods meatpacking plant in Holcomb, Kansas in late summer of 2019. However, since January of this year, the live cattle futures have lost nearly a quarter of their value. Cattle producers and agriculture lenders are feeling the pressure and USCA fears additional fallout could occur as the U.S. takes the proper risk management protocols to control the spread of the current pandemic.

We ask that you and your staff take immediate action through the utilization of your authority under the Commodity Credit Corporation. In short, funds and programs are needed to ensure that cattle producers and feeders that are experiencing excessive price losses are provided immediate relief. This is a unique market disruption and we trust that you and your staff will present a customized, timely and effective program for the U.S. cattle industry.

We also ask that USDA Agriculture Marketing Service (APHIS) and Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) issue a statement regarding certainty as it links to ensuring federal inspection of meat packing facilities. Personnel need to be deemed ‘essential personnel’ that will continue their role despite changes to federal work force guidelines. Protocols are needed to ensure that plants do not get immediately shut down should an employee test positive for the Coronavirus. These policies need to be outlined in advance of any cases being reported. In addition, if needed on an emergency basis, plants should be able to continue operating even if there is not a complete USDA staff available. For a short period of time, self-regulation can suffice. Ensuring that meat processing facilities and the ports remain open during the days ahead is most critical.

In addition, we ask that you monitor anti-competitive buying practices in the days and weeks ahead. We remain deeply concerned by the proposed rulemaking intended to weaken the Packers and Stockyards Act and its oversight functions. We ask that you convene livestock industry leaders to work on and improve the competitiveness and price discovery within the cattle market.
USCA is committed to working with you, the Trump Administration and Congress to ensure the long-term success and viability of the U.S. cattle industry. Immediate action is needed, and we stand ready to assist to ensure a bright and prosperous future for U.S. cattle producers.

Sincerely,

Dr. Brooke Miller, MD
President, United States Cattlemen’s Association

CC:

Senator Pat Roberts, Chairman, U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry
Senator Debbie Stabenow, Ranking Member U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry
Representative Collin Peterson, Chairman, U.S. House Committee on Agriculture
Representative Michael Conaway, Ranking Member, U.S. House Committee on Agriculture

Stephen Censky, Deputy Secretary of Agriculture, USDA
Bill Northey, Under Secretary, Farm Production and Conservation, USDA
Ted McKinney, Under Secretary, Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs, USDA
Gregory Ibach, Under Secretary, Marketing and Regulatory Programs, USDA
Stephen Vaden, General Counsel, USDA
Gary Washington, Chief Information Officer, USDA