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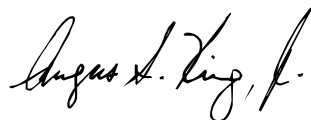
Additionally, the CFAP program included \$16 billion for direct payments to farmers to assist with financial losses resulting from lost demand due to COVID-19 between January and May. Wild blueberry growers are making decisions today. They must decide how much money and time to invest in their 2020 crop in the era of COVID-19. Their investments today not only impact the 2020 harvest, but also the 2021 harvest, as in this unique system fields are only harvested every other year. Most growers will not be able to show a loss until September at the earliest, once fields are harvested and berries processed if Maine wild blueberry growers were to receive proactive recourses now, growers would invest those funds into their fields to prevent yield losses later in the year. I request that, as the USDA continues to provide relief for producers impacted by COVID-19, the Department strongly consider proactive programs to stem losses, and stem decreases in America's food supply, supporting risk-averse growers that may otherwise cut their losses by not investing in their fields in this uncertain market.

Although at present agricultural workers, including H-2A laborers, are considered essential, Maine blueberry growers are very concerned that due to COVID-19 many of these workers will decide not to travel to Maine for the 2020 season due to COVID-19 related challenges. In fact, some growers are already hearing that employees they have relied on for years will not be making the trip. How do agricultural workers keep their families and themselves safe while traveling across the country? Once in Maine, can these workers find safe accommodations that will enable them to follow COVID-19 social distancing guidelines?

It is important that the USDA and Department of Labor (DOL) proactively address these concerns to ease the minds of Maine wild blueberry growers and their labor force, in order to ensure that growers have a 2020 crop and the labor to harvest it. I request that the DOL and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) ensure that all H-2A visa applications are reviewed and acted upon in a timely manner to ensure the flow of approved H-2A workers into the U.S, and that the USDA consider federal support systems to help pay for the extra cost of managing and housing workers while following COVID-19 precautionary guidelines.

Thank you for the Department's work done thus far to help provide relief for farmers impacted by COVID-19. I ask that you give this request every appropriate consideration, in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations.

Sincerely,



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Angus S. King, Jr.  
United States Senator

Cc: Eugene Scalia, Secretary of the Department of Labor