



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

July 10, 2020

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

We write today to obtain additional information regarding the Farmers to Families Food Box Program for which the Department of Agriculture has recently awarded contracts.

As you know, COVID-19 has only amplified our national need for food banks. Since the widespread onset of the virus in mid-March, forcing closures of schools and spikes in unemployment, food banks have seen about a 70 percent increase in their demand<sup>1</sup>. Simultaneously, the shuttering of restaurants and schools prompted enormous changes to food demand, leading many food producers, particularly in the dairy and meat industry, to throw away good food. They did so at enormous financial cost.

Congress authorized the Farmers to Families Food Box Program as part of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act to remedy this problem. The overall goal of this program was to connect those food producers with excess food to the communities who need it most. Unfortunately, however, reporting has shown that the program is failing to achieve that mission. The rushed and non-transparent process that the USDA used to award food distribution contracts has resulted in a highly inequitable program that does not reflect need. Only 4 percent of the distribution contracts awarded by the USDA were awarded to the Northeast region in the first cycle of distribution, despite having been the hardest-hit region of the Coronavirus pandemic<sup>2</sup>. The Northeast received one-fifth of the relief per COVID patient than the next-least-funded region. The second cycle of distribution, released on July 1, did not substantially change the unequal distribution of contracts to Northeast vendors.

We also have been troubled by concerns that the organizations awarded food distribution contracts are often logistically ill-equipped to deliver food at scale. Reports have shown that there are many companies awarded contracts so large that they needed to hire external staff to carry out the contracts. Other reports suggest that almost a third of the contractors selected by the USDA are not properly licensed to deliver the food they are contractually obligated to deliver.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-blog/want-help-food-banks-during-pandemic-heres-how>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.propublica.org/article/trumps-food-aid-program-gives-little-funding-to-the-northeast-where-coronavirus-hit-hardest>

The combination of inequity and logistical struggle has created serious challenges for Food Banks in New York. While food banks in other parts of the country are receiving ample supplies of food boxes, the lack of distribution contracts in New York is providing an unfair limitation on the number of food boxes they can obtain.

We all know this is a critical time for our families and our farmers. We all want to make sure that this program and others designed to provide urgently needed food to Americans are successful in the most efficient and effective way.

Given these concerns, we are hopeful that the USDA can provide us answers to the following questions regarding the selection and implementation of this program no later than July 17, 2020:

1. Outline the guidance USDA employed to determine how much funding would be distributed to each region. What metric was it based on?
2. How did the USDA determine if an applicant would be awarded a contract? What rubric was used to evaluate proposals?
3. Was comment or feedback provided to applicants who were not awarded contracts? Please provide records of the applicants' inquiries and your responses.
4. What quality assurance measures does USDA have in place to ensure that food boxes are actually delivered to not-for-profits? Please provide all documentation to demonstrate that such deliveries are taking place before payment is processed.
5. How does the USDA ensure that food within the food boxes meets minimum standards of quality? How does the USDA ensure that distributors maintain proper food safety procedures when transporting food?
6. Did USDA interact or consult with Feeding America in any way in the implementation of this program? Please provide a record of any such communication.
7. Please provide a complete list of all not-for-profits that have delivery relationships with CFAP box contractors.
8. What preparations are taking place right now for the next RFP round? Will current contracts be renewed? Will applicants from the first round be automatically considered, or will they have to resubmit?

We look forward to receiving the requested information and to working with you to achieve that goal.

Signed,



---

Paul D. Tonko  
Member of Congress



---

Antonio Delgado  
Member of Congress



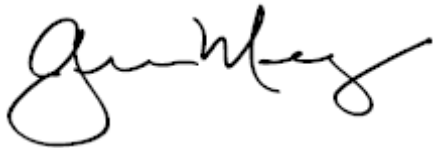
---

Thomas R. Suozzi  
Member of Congress



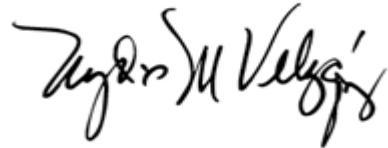
---

Kathleen M. Rice  
Member of Congress



---

Grace Meng  
Member of Congress



---

Nydia M. Velázquez  
Member of Congress



---

Hakeem Jeffries  
Member of Congress

  
M.C.


---

Yvette D. Clarke  
Member of Congress



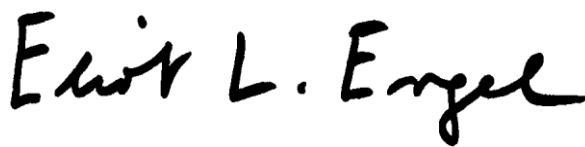
---

Jerrold Nadler  
Member of Congress



---

José E. Serrano  
Member of Congress



---

Eliot Engel  
Member of Congress



---

Nita Lowey  
Member of Congress



---

Joseph D. Morelle  
Member of Congress



---

Brian Higgins  
Member of Congress