

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 3, 2021

The Honorable Kevin Shea
Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Acting Secretary Shea,

The resolve of America's agricultural producers and harvesters is constantly being tested, and never has that fact rung truer than during the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the hardest hit – and, unfortunately, overlooked – agricultural sectors has been timber harvesting and hauling. The plight of our forest products industry has increasingly worsened since March of last year, when the onset of the pandemic crashed global pulp and paper markets and housing starts dwindled. In the months that followed, domestic paper mills across the country have drastically slashed output or shut down their operations altogether – which the American Loggers Council estimates caused a reduction of \$1.83 billion (or 13 percent loss) in the value of logger-delivered wood.

During 2020, the federal government provided much-needed COVID-19-related assistance to various agricultural harvesters and producers, including fiber commodities such as Christmas trees and cotton, through the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program established in the CARES Act. Against our urging, however, USDA deemed loggers ineligible for this relief. That is why, in addition to introducing the *Loggers Relief Act*, we worked to include in the *Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriation Act*, “\$200,000,000 to provide relief to timber harvesting and timber hauling businesses that have, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, experienced a loss of not less than 10 percent in gross revenue during the period beginning on January 1, 2020, and ending on December 1, 2020, as compared to the gross revenue of that timber harvesting or timber hauling business during that same period in 2019.”

Given the severity of the situation, many loggers and haulers are facing hard decisions about whether they can afford to keep on in the industry. These small businesses are structured similarly to owner-operated farms: in both sectors, operations tend to have few employees and substantial equipment costs. Like farmers, our loggers and haulers are an essential part of a much larger economy built around manufacturing the commodity product into value-added goods. In order to keep the broader forest products sector operational, we must ensure our loggers and haulers make it through this enormously challenging time.

We urge you to quickly implement this critical provision in order to distribute this assistance as soon as possible. We also recommend that you strongly consider the input that the American Loggers Council has provided to your transition team on implementation (attached), as they have proven to be a reliable and responsive resource for the industry. We look forward to working with you on this important issue and stand ready to provide guidance and answer any questions that you might have.


Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator



John Cornyn
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



Thom Tillis
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Richard Burr
United States Senator



Bill Cassidy, M.D.
United States Senator



Roger F. Wicker
United States Senator

cc: Agriculture Secretary-designate Tom Vilsack