

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 11, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We write today to inquire about the actions USDA is taking to expand the delivery options available to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an unprecedented rise in unemployment and a subsequent increase in demand for food assistance. At the same time, social distancing guidelines and stay at home orders have made it challenging – and unsafe – for many individuals to travel to purchase food. This is especially true for seniors and immunocompromised individuals who are at higher risk of serious illness from COVID-19, as well as individuals with disabilities and families who lack reliable transportation. We believe that no individual or family should be disadvantaged simply because they rely on SNAP benefits to access the food they need.

We appreciate USDA's work to expedite the process through which states and retailers are able to participate in the SNAP Online Purchasing Pilot. For participating states, this innovative program provides an opportunity to increase and streamline delivery options, and the Department's efforts to rapidly expand the pilot is one important component of the work that is needed to expand SNAP recipients' access to delivery services. We thank you for developing the simplified template for states to enroll as well as for your work to increase participation from additional retailers. In addition to these efforts to expand the Online Purchasing Pilot, we believe that it is also critical to further expand and maximize the alternative mechanisms that exist to facilitate delivery for SNAP participants.

During this public health and economic crisis, it is vital that USDA do everything it can to continue to further expand delivery and curbside pickup options for SNAP recipients. These tools not only benefit and protect SNAP participants, but they are also essential for the economic benefits that SNAP purchases provide to businesses, farmers and local communities. We ask that you respond to the following questions by May 15, 2020.

1. Have you taken any steps to expand the ability of authorized SNAP retailers to access mobile/wireless Point of Sale (POS) devices for the purpose of delivery and curbside pickup?

- a. How are you working with States and authorized retailers to provide them with information regarding the option to offer delivery services to SNAP participants if they have mobile/wireless POS devices?
 - b. Have you taken any steps to help retailers interested in offering delivery service to acquire mobile POS or identify partners with delivery capabilities?
 - c. How are you working with retailers exempt from the requirement to pay for their EBT equipment and service (farmers markets, direct marketing farmers, military commissaries, non-profit buying cooperatives) to expand delivery or access to mobile devices?
2. What steps have you taken to notify SNAP recipients of the options that currently exist for online ordering, delivery and pickup options?
Are you able to compile a centralized list of the retailers that provide these options, or work with the states to compile them by state?
3. How is USDA working to authorize direct to consumer retailers (that have delivery capabilities) to accept SNAP benefits?
 - a. How long is it taking to authorize additional retailers who have become interested in authorization as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?
 - b. What barriers have you encountered to expediting this process as interest in authorization continues to grow?
4. Many SNAP participants, especially in rural areas, lack reliable access to internet services. Has USDA issued any guidance or best practices for retailers about how to protect SNAP participants from fraud while also offering alternatives to online ordering such as placing orders over the phone?
5. Many older adults do not have experience shopping for groceries online, and low-income older adults who order groceries for delivery or pick up do so less frequently than those of higher incomes. Has USDA has provided guidance to retailers on providing easy to follow instruction or support for SNAP participants who may not have previous experience shopping online?
6. How are you working to expand the technical support available to farmers, farmers markets and food hubs to offer delivery services to SNAP participants?
 - a. How many, and which, states currently utilize USDA funding to support farmers and farmers markets in accessing mobile/wireless POS devices and services? How many states include requirements for no-cost wireless equipment for exempt entities in their EBT state processing contracts?
 - b. What funding do you have available for FY20 to support mobile/wireless POS equipment and services for farmers markets and direct market farmers through the state agencies?
7. What funding sources and technical assistance are available to support mobile/wireless POS equipment through the States for non-exempt retailers during the COVID-19 pandemic?
8. What steps are you taking to simplify the process and identify cost-saving solutions to expedite the adoption of mobile/wireless POS processing capacity for all retailers?
9. As interest and demand continues to grow for SNAP delivery services, how is USDA engaging with other federal agencies around recommended health precaution and protection for retailers, consumers and delivery workers?

We thank you for your immediate attention to these questions.

Sincerely,

/s/ Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator

/s/ Susan M. Collins
United States Senator

/s/ Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator

/s/ Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator

/s/ Robert Menendez
United States Senator

/s/ Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

/s/ Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator

/s/ Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

/s/ Ron Wyden
United States Senator

/s/ Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

/s/ Tina Smith
United States Senator

/s/ Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

/s/ Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

/s/ Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator

/s/ Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator

/s/ Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

/s/ Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator

/s/ Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

/s/ Patrick Leahy
United States Senator

/s/ Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

/s/ Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

/s/ Patty Murray
United States Senator

/s/ Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

/s/ Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator

/s/ Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

/s/ Jack Reed
United States Senator

/s/ Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

/s/ Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator