

Ryan F. Quarles
Commissioner



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Kentucky Department of Agriculture

March 12, 2020

Secretary Sonny Perdue
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue,

As Kentucky's Commissioner of Agriculture, I started the Kentucky Hunger Initiative to combat the unfortunate reality that one in seven Kentuckians and one in five Kentucky school children is food insecure. I am writing to you today to request flexibility for school districts to provide meals to students affected by school closures while Kentucky takes the appropriate steps to combat the spread of COVID-19, commonly referred to as the coronavirus.

As you know, many students around the nation and in Kentucky receive their only meals during school time. When school is closed due to severe weather or a public health event like coronavirus, school leaders are constrained in their ability to provide meals due to the congregate feeding rule, which requires students to consume meals provided to them on-site. One of the greatest actions the USDA can take to assist Kentucky during this time is to issue a temporary waiver from the congregate feeding rule. Temporarily waiving this rule ensures students can grab the meal quickly and return home, rather than congregating in one place where they could become infected with coronavirus.

USDA has already issued temporary waivers in a few states. While only a few school districts in Kentucky are currently closed, we anticipate that others may close in the coming days. We also anticipate that many of these districts will be closed for several days or weeks at a time. During this time, it is critical that meals are provided to students—especially those whose only guaranteed meal might be from the school system. I understand that the Kentucky Department of Education is formalizing a waiver request to submit to your department.

I appreciate your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Dr. Ryan F. Quarles
Commissioner of Agriculture
Commonwealth of Kentucky

