



March 18, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture
Room 200-A
Jamie Whitten Building
14th Street & Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Thank you for all you and your USDA team are doing to support American agriculture during this critical time. We are thankful for your leadership.

As you know, the U.S. pork industry and other livestock producers are facing a severe labor shortage. We have a long-standing dependence on foreign workers to care for our animals and to help run our plants. We have serious concerns that the COVID-19 situation will exacerbate what is already a major industry challenge.

This week's decision to halt visa processing at our Mexico consulate heightened our concerns. We are particularly concerned with access to workers made available through TN visas. Specialized TN workers with particular skills are critical to the operation of U.S. hog farms. Although there is some use of H-2A workers, the year-round operations of hog farms significantly limit the utility of this program. With potential COVID-19 disruptions, we can't afford to lose access to a critical labor pool. The following examples, drawn from input from pork producers across the country, illustrate the U.S. pork industry's dependence on these programs:

"We have come to rely on the TN program to fill employment gaps in specialized positions on our sow farms across the state."

"Nearly 40 percent of our sow farm employees are TN workers."

"After three years of growth, we have additional open positions on our sow farms that we have been unable to completely fill with domestic workers."

"We are in the midst of an aggressive recruitment push of TN workers to provide business stability and continuity in the midst of trade uncertainty."

"Every two weeks, we provide training and onboarding for 9-10 new TN visa workers arriving from Mexico."

"We currently have 67 open positions on our sow farms."

"We have close to 100 TN visa employees, almost 46 percent of our on-farm workers, many of which are traveling in the next few weeks to renew. They've received notification about consulates cancelling immigrant and non-immigrant visa appointments."

The Global Voice of the U.S. Pork Industry

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U.S. pork producers are committed to working with the USDA and upholding our special responsibility for meeting the nation's nutrition needs. We ask for your support for new solutions to make sure our farmers have access to the labor pool we need to deliver on this promise.

Sincerely,

Howard A.V. Roth
President, National Pork Producers Council
Pork Producer, Wauzeka, Wisconsin

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