

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 30, 2020

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

President Trump—

We write to ask for your partnership to ensure those working in our food processing facilities are safe on the job. As you take action through the Defense Production Act as authorized by Congress to reopen our meat processing plants, we urge you also to take every step necessary—including fully utilizing the Defense Production Act—to address our national shortage of life-saving personal protective equipment (PPE).

The COVID-19 pandemic has created real hardship for farmers and ranchers and sickened hundreds of processing plant workers—and has tragically been fatal to many. Outbreaks of COVID-19 at meat processing plants have choked our food supply chain and forced our pork producers to make heartbreaking and economically devastating decisions. Many of us urged you to take decisive action to relieve the dire circumstances created by the spread of coronavirus and associated plant closures.

For the districts we represent, farming and food processing are critically important to our economy and our way of life. We share the goal of seeing our communities and agriculture producers through this crisis. Despite your intention to open these plants, there is still much that is unknown about what will be done to ensure workers are safe on the job, how they will be cleared to work, or what options are available if they feel unsafe. As we have seen firsthand, these outbreaks are deadly. Thousands of these essential workers today are infected with COVID-19, with the number of confirmed cases continues to rise in communities like Waterloo, Iowa, where the Tyson plant has become one of the worst outbreak sites in the country.

Along with widespread and rapid testing and enforceable safety standards, adequate PPE is critical to keeping workers safe. If we are now expecting employees to return to work amid a national shortage of PPE, we must use all tools available to ensure the availability of PPE.

We can all agree that workers should have access to PPE. The reality, however, is that our country does not, and has not, had enough supplies since the beginning of this crisis. During the last week, the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Department of Health and Human Services acknowledged as much, telling Congress that we lack adequate supplies of tests or PPE, and that these shortages are likely to continue.

Mr. President, this is about the future of our country. Like our farmers, distributors and retailers, these workers are an integral part of our food supply chain. These plants cannot operate without them and they deserve the dignity and security of meaningful on-the-job protections. That's why we urge you to invoke the Defense

Production Act to guarantee the production of enough PPE for our frontline workers — just as you have done to keep these plants open, to ensure an adequate supply of ventilators and in thousands of other instances over the last three years.

With so many lives and livelihoods on the line, we need to take every possible precaution to ensure the health and safety of those working in our meat processing facilities and others on the front lines of this pandemic.

We hope to work with you to address the national shortage of PPE with the same speed with which you took action on food processing facilities and look forward to your reply.

Regards,



Abby Finkenauer
Member of Congress



Cindy Axne
Member of Congress



Dave Loebsack
Member of Congress