

W. GREGORY STEUBE
17TH DISTRICT, FLORIDA
JUDICIARY
OVERSIGHT & REFORM
VETERANS' AFFAIRS



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

WASHINGTON OFFICE
521 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-5792

PUNTA GORDA OFFICE
226 TAYLOR ST. #230
PUNTA GORDA, FL 33950

April 21, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue,

We thank you for your continued actions in support of America's farmers as we adapt to new realities caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. We write this letter to urge you to reconsider the planned loosening of the enforcement of Country of Origin Label (COOL) regulations beginning on April 20.

As our farmers and ranchers in Florida and across the country are struggling to cope with the decrease in demand for their products with the economic shutdowns, we urge you to not increase the competition for their products with this decision. As you already know, milk is being dumped, produce is rotting, and meat is going bad on our farms. Distribution to retail is one of the last major in-person service available to our agricultural sector; and, with millions of pounds of American commodities at risk, our farmers should not have to compete against products potentially from foreign countries at this time.

Loosening the enforcement of COOL regulations could inject food supplies into our market from other countries without giving our consumers the option of supporting struggling American farms in this crisis. With over 47,000 farms and almost 2 million employed in agriculture or supporting industries, Florida will be extremely negatively affected by increased competition for any period during this crisis.

We understand the desire for flexibility in maintaining the food supply chain, but the flexibility should be emphasized on supporting American farmers. Farmers will find it easier to negotiate with retailers if retailers are not able to source more product that is potentially out-of-country. The food is here, and we should be able to secure a mutually beneficial arrangement for both retailer and farmer that secures our food supply chain and the livelihood of our farmers.

Our agricultural producers are hurting, but they are continuing to work to put food on our tables. We should be doing everything we can to make sure they can put food on their own tables. We thank you for your consideration of this urgent request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "W. Gregory Steube". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "W." being particularly prominent.

W. Gregory Steube
Member of Congress

The following members have co-signed this letter:

Val Demings (FL-10)

Gus Bilirakis (FL-12)

Mario Diaz-Balart (FL-25)

Neal Dunn (FL-02)

John Rutherford (FL-04)

Darren Soto (FL-09)