



February 27, 2026

The Honorable Brooke Rollins
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Rollins:

We commend President Donald J. Trump for his strong record of advancing regulatory reform and reducing red tape across the agricultural sector. His administration has prioritized cutting unnecessary burdens that have long constrained farmers, ranchers, and agribusinesses. Initiatives such as the reduction of duplicative rules, streamlining of permitting, and aggressive action to eliminate outdated regulations will strengthen rural economies and provide lasting benefits to America’s producers. These reforms set the stage for a stronger agricultural system, and we thank you for leading on this important work at the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

We write today to urge the Department of Agriculture to institutionalize certain regulatory flexibilities proven effective in recent years. In addition, we urge cooperation with other cabinet-level departments to solidify these goals, as some agricultural regulatory reforms require work across multiple agencies.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, the federal government temporarily suspended or relaxed numerous rules that constrained producers, processors, and distributors. These emergency measures cut red tape, kept supply chains moving, and gave farmers more autonomy, all without compromising worker safety or the integrity of America’s food supply.

While we recognize that the pandemic was a singular event, we urge the Department to consider revisiting past efforts aimed at cutting red tape and helping farmers and ranchers. Below are a few suggestions.

1. Crop Insurance and USDA Loan Flexibility

Consider streamlining USDA paperwork requirements by allowing digital signatures and self-certification. In addition, we suggest the adoption of deferred interest accrual on crop insurance premium payments.¹ This simple modernization would reduce administrative bottlenecks while maintaining accountability.

Under such administrative flexibility, small farms would be able to access operating loans without traveling to county offices or mailing paper documentation, enabling timely planting in diverse circumstances.

We recommend that USDA:

- Make digital signatures and self-certification a standing option.
- Allow longer grace periods for crop insurance premium payments in years of natural disaster or economic stress.

2. Food Labeling Adjustments

We ask that the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) allow bulk foods and eggs originally destined for restaurants to be redirected to grocery shelves without extensive re-labeling.²

Under such a reform, poultry producers, for example, would be able to sell institutional-packaged eggs, not just to restaurants, but directly to grocery stores. Such commonsense flexibility would open the door to larger markets for small producers and others.

We recommend that USDA, in coordination with FDA, explore a permanent “emergency labeling pathway” allowing rapid redirection of food products during market disruptions. These disruptions would include any state or federal declared state of emergency, but additional flexibility could also be granted when the prices of essential foods exceed historical levels, as adjusted for inflation, or due to other economic or industry stressors.

3. Trucking and Transportation Relief

From March 2020 to October 2022, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) waived hours-of-service regulations for transport of food, feed, and livestock.³

Thanks to this regulatory relief, feed trucks, for example, were able to complete longer runs to poultry farms without costly overnight delays. This preserved both animal welfare and economic efficiency.

¹USDA Risk Management Agency. COVID-19 Flexibilities for Crop Insurance Policies. USDA, 2020.

²Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS). Temporary Policy Regarding Labeling of Food for Retail Sale During COVID-19. USDA, 2020.

³Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA). Emergency Declaration Under 49 CFR § 390.23. U.S. DOT, 2020–2022.

We recommend USDA advocate for a standing agricultural exemption during regional or national supply chain disruptions: again, during declared states of emergency and periods of inflation and economic distress.

4. Environmental Compliance Discretion

In the recent past, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has also allowed temporary flexibility in routine reporting.⁴ Under this flexibility, for example, dairy operators unable to bring in consultants to complete water monitoring on schedule have been able to avoid unfair penalties.

While environmental safeguards are important, this discretion demonstrates that penalties for minor paperwork delays are often disproportionate to the actual environmental impact. We encourage USDA to work with EPA on establishing a permanent mechanism for reasonable compliance extensions in a variety of circumstances, especially for small farmers.

5. Import Documentation Modernization

USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) accepted electronic phytosanitary and veterinary certificates for imports and exports beginning in 2020, with some of these elements still in place.⁵ This digital reform improved efficiency without undermining safety.

For example, seed companies importing high-demand hybrid seed corn were able to move shipments without waiting weeks for paper documents. This modernization should be expanded to cover additional categories of documentation.

We recommend that USDA:

- Mandate acceptance of electronic documentation across all programs where security and authenticity can be assured.
- Develop a unified digital portal for agricultural import/export paperwork.

Past efforts at reducing regulatory burdens by offering various flexibilities have proven safe and effective. We urge the Department to revisit these ideas and work with the states to streamline our food and fiber systems so as to better serve consumers in the 21st century. Such waivers would not only lower costs, but also strengthen the resilience of American agriculture.

⁴U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). COVID-19 Implications for EPA's Enforcement and Compliance Assurance Program. March 26, 2020.

⁵USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). Acceptance of Electronic Phytosanitary Certificates During COVID-19. USDA, 2020.

We look forward to meeting with your office soon about these requests and appreciate your dedication to helping American farmers and families grow and thrive.

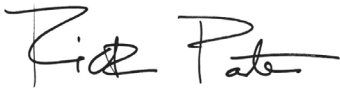
Respectfully submitted,



Commissioner Andy Gipson
Mississippi Department of Agriculture
and Commerce



Commissioner Jonathan Shell
Kentucky Department of Agriculture



Commissioner Rick Pate
Alabama Department of Agriculture and
Industries



Commissioner Steve Troxler
North Carolina Department of
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Lt. Governor Micah Beckwith
Indiana Secretary of Agriculture and
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Commissioner Kent Leonhardt
West Virginia Department of
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cc: Stephen Vaden, Deputy Secretary of Agriculture

cc: Alexander Meyer, Director of the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs

cc: Jared Borg, Deputy Director of the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs
for State Governments