



**STATE OF MISSISSIPPI  
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND COMMERCE**

ANDY GIPSON  
COMMISSIONER

# **PRESS RELEASE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 3, 2026**

**Contact:** Hannah East, Communications Director  
(601) 359-1179 / cell: (662) 816-3230  
[HannahE@mdac.ms.gov](mailto:HannahE@mdac.ms.gov)

## **Agricultural Leaders Urge USDA to Adopt Proven Regulatory Measures as Permanent Policies**

**JACKSON, Miss.** – Mississippi Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce Andy Gipson, along with state agricultural leaders from Alabama, Indiana, Kentucky, North Carolina and West Virginia, sent a letter to U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins urging the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to make permanent several regulatory measures that have strengthened America’s agricultural system.

Several of these regulations were first implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic as emergency measures to relax rules that constrain producers, processors and distributors. Though the pandemic was a singular event, ag leaders argue these measures which cut unnecessary red tape and strengthened the country’s supply chains proved highly effective and should continue.

“Farmers and ranchers thrive when unnecessary bureaucratic barriers are removed,” said Commissioner Gipson. “Reforms such as reducing duplicative rules, streamlining permitting, and modernizing outdated processes strengthen rural economies and position American agriculture for long-term success. So many of these reforms demonstrated lasting value and should be made permanent.”

Agricultural leaders pointed to emergency measures adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic that temporarily eased regulatory requirements without compromising food safety, worker protections or environmental standards. These measures include crop insurance and USDA loan flexibility; food labeling adjustments; trucking and transportation relief; environmental compliance discretion; and import documentation modernization.

The letter also applauds the Trump Administration for prioritizing regulatory reform and cutting red tape that has long burdened farmers, ranchers and agribusinesses. The signatories thanked Secretary Rollins for her leadership and encouraged continued action to institutionalize reforms that proved so effective in recent years.

View the official letter at <https://agnet.mdac.ms.gov/agManage/uploads/3305.pdf>.

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**Letter attached.**



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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>

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.

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

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

<sup>3</sup>Federal 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.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.

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

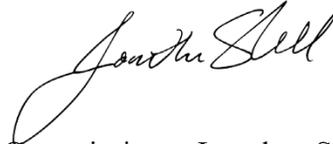
<sup>5</sup>USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). Acceptance of Electronic Phytosanitary Certificates During COVID-19. USDA, 2020.

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  
Agriculture and Consumer Services



Lt. Governor Micah Beckwith  
Indiana Secretary of Agriculture and  
Rural Development



Commissioner Kent Leonhardt  
West Virginia Department of  
Agriculture

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