



April 21, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture

The Honorable Alex M. Azar II
Secretary of Health and Human Services
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

The Honorable Chad Wolf
Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security

The Honorable Eugene Scalia
Secretary of Labor
U.S. Department of Labor

Dear Mr. Secretary,

As the companies that provide the vast majority of America's canned and frozen fruits and vegetables, we are writing to advise you that our ability to process this year's fruit and vegetable harvest is in grave jeopardy and to **request an urgent teleconference** with us to share the need for your coordination with state and local officials to provide them appropriate support.

The Pack--Only One Shot

The canned and frozen vegetable industry operates its plants seasonally when the crops are ready to be harvested. **Beginning late spring**, we more than double our workforce with seasonal labor, many of whom are housed and fed at company provided housing.

The fruit and vegetable processing industry **only operates our facilities seasonally**. Our plants are scaled to handle huge quantities of raw produce, which are contracted with growers that are generally located within 75 miles of the production facility. There is little flexibility to compensate for lost workdays during the harvest season.

To give you some perspective, **a year's supply of our nation's canned and frozen corn is packed within a 60-day window**. For canned and frozen peaches, it is just 50 days. Tomatoes, green beans and peas are also packed within a short harvest window. During this period, several hundred million cases are packed with the assistance of thousands of seasonal workers in facilities that operate seven days a week

Of course, canned fruits and vegetables play a particularly strong role in meeting the dietary needs of lower income Americans due to their low cost and food waste avoidance. Schools and hospitals, in particular, depend on our products due to their ease of storage and serving.

1000 Maine Avenue SW | Suite 400 | Washington, D.C. 20024

For inquiries via email, please reach out to Denise Bode (AFVPGC Coordinator) at dabode@michaelbeststrategies.com



The Challenge

We are getting lots of regulatory advice from State and local authorities, some of which is not consistent. In one specific instance, we have local and state authorities contradicting the recently issued CDC guidelines on returning food industry workers who are asymptomatic within 72 hours. We are being told by local authorities that they are insisting on 14 days quarantine in contravention of the CDC guidelines. This example is a microcosm of what may happen this summer when we are converting fresh produce into frozen or canned fruits and vegetables.

Our Request

We are committed to providing the fruit and vegetable products that America needs while following protocols that have been reviewed by federal agencies to ensure employee and broader public health protection. We respectfully request:

1. Federal coordination with state and local health authorities to ensure that they understand and are strongly encouraged to follow standard protocols reviewed by federal public health agencies. The objective of this coordination is to avoid misunderstandings and ad hoc regulatory requirements that may be imposed by well-meaning local public health officials, but without access to the latest and best science.
2. A federal rapid response capability to promptly address situations where state and local authorities are disrupting operations of fruit and vegetable processing facilities in a manner that appears to be inconsistent with standard protocols. We have arranged for Denise Bode, Michael Best, to coordinate industry efforts through her role as the Washington based Coordinator of the American Fruit and Vegetable Growers and Processors Coalition.

Conclusion

We submit that our requests, above, for proactive education of federal and state and local responders to our plight and a rapid response capability are essential to processing of this year's crops of fruits and vegetables for processing. Without these measures, we are convinced that direct federal intervention will be required to avoid fruit and vegetable crops rotting in the fields due to regulatory confusion and closure of processing facilities, reducing their availability to the American people.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Greg Longstreet
President and CEO, Del Monte Foods

Kraig Kayser
President and CEO, Seneca Foods

Brian Reichert
President and CEO, Red Gold Foods

Harry Overly
CEO, Sun-Maid Growers of California

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**Meghan Swan**

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Thomas Hunter

Co-President, McCall Farms

Bill Gast

President, Beckman and Gast

Glen Tellock

President and CEO, Lakeside Foods

Jim Peterson

CEO, Ball Metalpack

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President and CEO, Pacific Coast
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Matt Reid

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Ann Garner Riddle

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Matt Jones

CEO, The Neil Jones Food Company

Bill Sherman

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Stanley K. Dunbar

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