

VIA EMAIL ONLY TO DHSSDMAC@dhs.wisconsin.gov

January 15, 2021

Secretary-Designee Andrea Palm
Department of Health Services
1 W. Wilson St.
Madison, WI 53707

RE: **SMDAC Vaccine Distribution Subcommittee Recommendations for the Wisconsin DHS for COVID-19 Vaccine Priority Group 1b**

Dear Secretary-Designee Palm and Members of the Vaccine Distribution Subcommittee:

Our undersigned organizations represent much of Wisconsin's food and agriculture industry. Collectively, we represent thousands of Wisconsin farmers, farm workers, farm service and supply workers and food processing workers. We greatly appreciate your leadership in helping navigate the state through the greatest public health crisis of the past century, but the next stage of addressing the crisis is distribution of the vaccine. We were very troubled by the recommendation made by the State Disaster Medical Advisory Committee (SDMAC) Vaccine Distribution Subcommittee to exclude food and agriculture workers from Phase 1b of the COVID-19 vaccine allocation.

Since the SDMAC recommendations were issued on Tuesday, the federal government announced a dramatic change in the disbursement of significant amounts of the vaccine which had been held in reserve. The limited number of doses the state was previously slated to receive certainly influenced the recommendations of the SDMAC.

Given the anticipated release of the additional vaccines, the addition of more essential workers such as those in food and ag to the 1b distribution should now be viable.

Food production and agricultural workers are critical to providing and maintaining the food supply that Wisconsin, the nation, and so many countries beyond rely on. Administering the vaccine is essential to this workforce is essential for these industries to continue feeding American families.

Our industry has worked hard to protect our workers and ensure that they are safe while keeping Wisconsin's food supply chain operational and uninterrupted throughout the pandemic. Farm and food production workers have a documented increased risk of acquiring infection because of their increased exposure to SARS-CoV2 (COVID-19).

Our workforce has an increased risk of transmitting disease to others because they work in close proximity to each other and, in some agricultural settings, they live together in communal housing and travel to work using shared transportation. The demographics of this workforce also highlights that a significant percentage of the population has a limited ability to miss work and a greater risk of financial hardship if they do miss work.^[1]

Accordingly, **we ask that the Department include food and agriculture workers in Wisconsin's Phase 1b designation.**

Thank you for your attention to this crucial matter.

AgCountry Farm Credit Services
Compeer Financial
Cooperative Network
Dairy Business Association
GrassWorks
GreenStone Farm Credit Services
GROWMARK, Inc
Midwest Food Products Association
Midwest South Eastern Equipment Dealers Association
Professional Dairy Producers of Wisconsin
Syngenta Crop Protection LLC
Wisconsin Agri-Business Association
Wisconsin Association of Professional Agricultural Consultants
Wisconsin Beverage Association
Wisconsin BioFuels Association
Wisconsin Cattlemen's Association
Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association
Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation
Wisconsin Farmers Union
Wisconsin Pork Association
Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association
Wisconsin Soybean Association
Wisconsin State Cranberry Growers Association

[1] Atriga, Samantha and Matthew Rae, *The COVID-19 Outbreak and Food Production Workers: Who is at Risk?*, Kaiser Family Foundation, June 3, 2020 (<https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/the-covid-19-outbreak-and-food-production-workers-who-is-at-risk/>)