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State-Tribal Relations Interim Committee

66th Montana Legislature

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June 26, 2020

Sent via email

Dear Secretary Perdue:

The State-Tribal Relations Committee of the Montana Legislature urges the U.S. Department of Agriculture to continue providing flexibility in meat inspection regulations to help livestock producers weather supply chain disruptions brought on by COVID-19. Small meat processing facilities ably stepped in to fill gaps left by closure or reduced operation of large processors and should be allowed to continue as needed. Both producers and consumers deserve the stability these small processors provide.

Moving forward, the STRC suggests that instead of requiring states to apply for waivers to make this adjustment, the USDA institute a trigger mechanism that automatically allows small processors to pitch in when production dips to a certain level.

You understand the seasonal demands on the livestock industry, whose producers have little leeway to adjust inventories. Delays in processing can be particularly harmful.

With livestock production a primary business on many reservations, the STRC emphasizes the importance of providing regulatory flexibility to keep producers and processors operating and tribal members employed.

These are unusual circumstances that call for innovative solutions. Thank you for considering the adoption of a trigger mechanism in lieu of waivers.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Jason Small in cursive.

Sen. Jason Small, Chair

Handwritten signature of Rae Peppers in cursive.

Rep. Rae Peppers, Vice Chair

cc: Montana Governor Steve Bullock
Senator Jon Tester
Senator Steve Daines
Congressman Greg Gianforte