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HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR,  
AND PENSIONS  
JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE

May 8, 2020

The Honorable Gregg Doud  
Chief Agriculture Negotiator  
Office of the U.S. Trade Representative  
600 17<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20508

Dear Ambassador Doud,

Thank you for your dedication to American agriculture and your tireless efforts to even the playing field for American farmers in global trade. The work done by Ambassador Lighthizer and your office have led to significant gains on behalf of American farmers in recent years and has further opened new markets for key Georgia commodities. However, I would like to draw your attention to an ongoing trade issue for a crucial sector of Georgia's agriculture footprint.

Georgia's fruit and vegetable growers are continually forced into unfair competition as the Mexican fruit and vegetable industry conducts targeted dumping of seasonal products into the U.S. market. As you know, this issue has been top of mind for Georgia congressional leaders for years and was singled out by members as a key objective for USTR during the renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Georgia fruit and vegetable producers have felt severe market pressure from Mexico's agriculture imports ever since NAFTA went into effect. Since then, imports from Mexico have increased dramatically at the expense of Georgia growers, who are unable to compete with inexplicably low prices from Mexico. In 2017, as USTR was in the midst of the renegotiation, the United States imported nearly \$25 billion worth of agriculture goods, \$13 billion of which were fruits and vegetables.

As Georgia's fruit and vegetable farmers begin, continue, and conclude this year's harvest, they continue to operate under the threat of Mexican imports and the questionable means through which the prices of these foreign products remain low. These undesirable conditions have further deteriorated dramatically as the COVID-19 outbreak closes schools, restaurants, and other critical markets for Georgia fruit and vegetable producers. In March of this year alone, Mexico exported nearly \$2 billion worth of fruits and vegetables into the U.S. market. Suffice it to say, it has never been harder to be a specialty crop farmer in Georgia.

Fruit and vegetable farmers across Georgia applauded USTR's decision to hold a field hearing this spring in Valdosta, Ga., on seasonal and perishable produce. Without an appropriate mechanism to petition U.S. trade courts and pursue legal trade remedies to combat this issue, Georgia farmers have little hope of relief. As you know, the Valdosta, Ga., field hearing was

canceled because of the coronavirus outbreak. While I believe this was a prudent action on the part of USTR, I implore you to ensure that this field hearing is rescheduled as soon as possible. Furthermore, I ask that this hearing remain a public, in-person hearing, rather than virtual. Georgia farmers deserve the opportunity to express their concerns and deliver testimony before officials, rather than online or over the phone. Access to broadband and consistent phone service continue to be a problem in rural Georgia, and I know that farmers are willing to travel as far as needed to demonstrate their concerns over this situation.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Despite the lack of provisions addressing this problem in the United States Mexico Canada Agreement (USMCA), I applaud USTR's willingness to investigate the matter and take in-person testimony from Georgia's farmers on how these imports threaten their livelihoods. As the federal government works to reopen the country and economy, I ask that this issue and public hearing remain at the top of USTR's priorities for the year.

Sincerely,



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Kelly Loeffler  
United States Senator