March 20, 2020

The Honorable Deb Fischer  
454 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Fischer,

On behalf of the Nebraska Farm Bureau Federation (NEFB) and our nearly 60,000 members, I am writing you today with a few thoughts during these unique times. As Nebraskans work to meet the challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic, Nebraska’s farm and ranch families are also working to adjust. However, as you well know, the business of providing food, feed, and fiber to the world will continue. While the suggestions below largely focus on economic issues, I commend your efforts supporting rural resilience and mental health awareness for farm and ranch families.

As Congress prepares to address the pandemic, NEFB would ask that you consider the following:

- **Market Assistance/Potential Market Manipulation**
  
  A. Unfortunately, market uncertainty has shook farm commodity markets at a time when those of us in production agriculture have experienced a multi-year decrease in overall farm income. From live cattle (down 25%), hogs (down 22%), soybeans (down 14%), corn (down 13%), and wheat (down 12%) to ethanol margins currently at negative 25 cents, from top to bottom, commodities are experiencing significant downward pressure.

  B. With these downward trends, we continue to hear concerns being expressed about potential market manipulation particularly amongst our cow/calf producing members. Farm Bureau has shared that concern with USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service as well as the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) over the past several days.

  **NEFB Ask:** (A) It is our hope Congress will look to provide some level of stabilization payments to farmers and ranchers who have watched commodity markets drop. We’d also ask that payments be expanded to include cattle producers as they continue to bear much of the brunt of this market downturn. (B) We would also ask that your office keep in touch with USDA as well as the CFTC and ask that they continue to monitor the current market situation.

- **Supply Chain Concerns**
  
  A. While stores around the country continue to see temporarily empty shelves, retailers remain confident supplies of a vast majority of food items remain available. However, while temporary supply shortages are certainly problematic, long-term shortages are much worse. That is why everyone must do all they can to ensure all of our nation’s food processing facilities remain operational during this difficult time.
B. As farmers prepare for this year’s planting season and cattle producers continue to work through calving, every effort should be made to ensure supplies of fertilizer, seed, crop protection products, feed and animal health products remain readily available. While many have already purchased many of these items, we must ensure the supply of these product are available when needed.

C. Another concern lies in the ethanol industry as ethanol producers have seen their already thin margins disappear, slightly rebound and then disappear again over the past week. This business is also vital to our state’s cattle industry as ethanol biproducts have become a near constant addition to feed rations. The shutting of plants could have far reaching consequences for rural communities across the state.

**NEFB Ask:** (A) From meat packing plants to dairy processors, it is important that Congress work with USDA to ensure food production plants remain operational and provide any regulatory relief that might be needed should problems arise. (B) While we absolutely appreciate the exemptions granted to livestock and crop haulers from federal Hours of Service regulations, the hauling of products such as fertilizer and livestock supplies should also be added to that list.

- **H-2A Worker Concerns**
  A. With the recent announcement by the State Department to suspend routine immigrant and nonimmigrant visa services at the U.S Embassy in Mexico City and all U.S. consulates in Mexico until further notice, NEFB is very worried about the availability of H-2A farm workers. While Nebraska may not be as reliant as some states on the H-2A program, farmers and ranchers across our country rely on this program to meet their labor needs. According to data complied by the American Farm Bureau, over 90 percent of the just under 300,000 H-2A workers in the United States came from Mexico.

  **NEFB Ask:** We would ask you to work with the Administration to find an appropriate mechanism, either through an emergency waiver or some other means, to ensure that H-2A workers may continue to safely come to America’s farms and ranches.

Senator Fischer, the toll COVID-19 is taking on our nation’s health care system, small businesses and overall economy has been profound. We urge you to take the aforementioned actions in order to limit the impacts on our nation’s food supply as well as our farm and ranch families. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me directly at 402-499-9485. As always, thank you for your continued friendship and everything you continue to do for Nebraska farmers and ranchers.

Sincerely,

Stephen D. Nelson
President