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June 14, 2017

Secretary Sonny Perdue
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

I am writing this letter as the voice of over 19,000 South Dakota farmers, ranchers, and rural community members. We, the South Dakota Farmers Union (SDFU), view production agriculture as vital to the success of rural communities across our state. Our membership urges you to handle the principles outlined in Executive Order 13781 with caution, especially in context to United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) reorganization. The Executive Order stands to endanger the integrity of each USDA agency and programs that support farmers, ranchers and rural communities in our state. These programs are vital to our nation's food security, therefore providing immense public benefit.

The establishment of an Under Secretary should help elevate the interests of farmers and ranchers on international trade matters. As Foreign Agriculture Service being the lone agency overseen by the Under Secretary, USDA should engage stakeholders on how to maximize the Under Secretary's ability to organize a multi-agency coordinated trade effort. The Under Secretary should ensure the agricultural sector is given priority consideration as the President renegotiates NAFTA.

Our membership urges the nomination of a highly-qualified, consensus-building Under Secretary that has proven expertise in both agricultural production and conservation practices. Many South Dakota farmers and ranchers hold strong relationships with their local Farm Service Agency (FSA), Risk Management Agency (RMA) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) field staff, which is vital to their individual operations. Merging these agencies could improve long term effectiveness. Our membership urges you to identify the importance of field staffers throughout South Dakota and maintain the structure of these field offices, as any change will endanger the trust between producers and agency staff.

Rural communities of South Dakota rely on Rural Development (RD) as a strong federal partner, as many areas struggle to recover from the Great Recession. RD's field offices and staff are crucial in allowing remote communities of South Dakota access to RD programs. Any cut in staffing and field offices would negatively impact these remote communities and the farms, ranches and small businesses that reside there. Our membership raises significant concern with RD's shift from a core Mission Area to an office under the Secretary. In the case that future secretaries pursue different priorities, RD would lose much of its decision-making power.

Thank you for your consideration of our remarks.

Sincerely,

Doug Sombke

South Dakota Farmers Union President