

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 25, 2020

Vice President Michael R. Pence
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Vice President Pence:

As our nation progresses deeper into the 2020 wildfire season while grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic, we write to you in your capacity as head of the White House Coronavirus Task Force (Task Force) to immediately address the safety needs of American farmers and farmworkers. We ask the Task Force to assist agricultural stakeholders, along with state and local governments, with the timely procurement of safety equipment, including N-95 masks. Such essential equipment will help protect those who continue to produce our agricultural products and contribute so much to our nation's food security.

In the past week, a heat wave has brought extreme temperatures to almost every corner of California. Temperatures reached 107 degrees in Santa Cruz, California, known for its moderate climate, and Death Valley broke records when it reached 130 degrees. Exposure to that type of heat can result in heat-related illnesses, ranging from exhaustion to more serious symptoms like stroke and organ damage. At the same time, excessive heat dries the landscape, making it more susceptible to fire. To date in 2020, 1,034 wildfires have burned 381,000 acres of National Forest System lands in California, and 7,330 wildfires have burned 1.1 million acres across all jurisdictions. Smoke from these wildfires contains chemicals, gasses, and fine particles that also can harm human health.

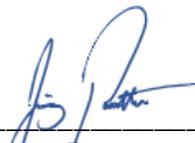
In the state of California, emergency regulations stipulate that, in workplace settings with significant wildfire smoke exposure, when the current Air Quality Index (AQI) for PM2.5 particulate is 151 or greater, employers must provide proper respiratory protection equipment to their employees, including N-95 masks, or equivalent masks that filter out fine particles from the smoke. On the central coast of California with its current heat and numerous wildfires, the AQI has already surpassed this threshold, hovering within the "hazardous" range of PM2.5 particulate between 301-500. With hot, dry weather continuing to trigger fires across the state, additional agricultural regions are likely to face this same threat. Unfortunately, agricultural producers are struggling to procure the necessary masks, given limited supplies and backlogs at the national level.

Many of the counties across California currently experiencing extreme heat and unhealthy air quality are also producing many of the agricultural products that continue to feed our nation during this bruising pandemic. The necessary and continued work by our farmers and farmworkers allows us to have nutritious food on our tables during this difficult period. At the same time, these essential workers are uniquely vulnerable to COVID-19 because of their working and living conditions. Along with the added challenges of wildfire smoke and heat stress, every action must be taken to put protections in place to ensure the safety of our farmers, farmworkers, and our food supply.

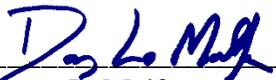
The combination of the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2020 wildfire season warrants our request for the Task Force to work with relevant state and federal agencies to ensure America's farmers and farmworkers have priority access to the protective gear they need to do their essential work, including N-95 or equivalent facial masks. We also encourage you to work with the same partners to provide additional resources to the agricultural workforce—assisting with the work California has done to prevent heat stress including increasing water, compensated breaks, and cooling stations.

Thank you for your timely consideration of this request. Your commitment to our nation's agriculture industry mandates that we continue to work together to provide protective equipment to its essential workforce. We look forward to working with you and the Task Force to ensure farmers and their employees have the protections they need to keep our nation food secure.

Sincerely,



Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress



Doug LaMalfa
Member of Congress

/s/
Mark Takano
Member of Congress

/s/
Mike Thompson
Member of Congress

/s/
Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

/s/
Tony Cárdenas
Member of Congress

/s/
Salud Carbajal
Member of Congress

/s/
Josh Harder
Member of Congress

/s/

Gilbert R. Cisneros, Jr.
Member of Congress

/s/

John Garamendi
Member of Congress

/s/

Doris Matsui
Member of Congress

/s/

Juan Vargas
Member of Congress

/s/

Jerry McNerney
Member of Congress

/s/

TJ Cox
Member of Congress

/s/

Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress

/s/

Julia Brownley
Member of Congress

/s/

Judy Chu
Member of Congress

/s/

Jim Costa
Member of Congress

/s/

Jared Huffman
Member of Congress

/s/

Maxine Waters
Member of Congress

/s/

Ami Bera
Member of Congress

/s/

Ted Lieu
Member of Congress

/s/

Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress

/s/

Lucille Roybal-Allard
Member of Congress

/s/

Susan A. Davis
Member of Congress