

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 24, 2025

The Honorable Brooke Rollins
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Rollins,

On the same day he was sworn in, President Trump signed an Executive Order effectively halting all investments under the *Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act*, commonly known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and *Inflation Reduction Act*, jeopardizing vital programs that support Oregon farmers and families. Despite court intervention at other agencies pausing these harmful cuts, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) continues to freeze critical funding, which continues to cause severe disruption to farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners who are implementing projects under these landmark pieces of legislation. Since then, the Trump Administration has also fired an estimated 4,200 dedicated public servants in Oregon and across the country, grinding critical work and research to a halt across the agency.

These funding freezes and mass firings are cutting jobs, stopping essential investments for our farmers and rural communities, and making our communities less resilient to market volatility from climate, supply chain disruptions, tariffs, and natural disasters. These agency actions must be immediately reversed.

Critical research partnerships with universities and local farmers and ranchers through the USDA Agricultural Research Service are devastated with uncertain futures after public servants at research stations in Pendleton, Burns, Hood River, Corvallis, and Newport were fired. This vital work helps Oregon's leading agricultural sectors find solutions toward improving soil health, dealing with wildfire smoke exposure in wine grapes, protecting the rangeland for both ranchers and ecosystems, and navigating threats like disease and pests to reliably bring global-class products to market.

Many of our constituents have already started much-needed infrastructure projects – such as irrigation modernization under the Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations Program to help farmers in drought-prone areas upgrade their irrigation practices to increase efficiency and conserve water – under the assurance that they would receive their grant money. Halting these payments means that a project in Hood River County will not only be delayed for over 100 days but will put the irrigation district at risk of insolvency. Even if funds are restored immediately, the current delay will ultimately increase the overall costs of this and other urgent projects while also costing hardworking Americans their jobs. Preventing grant recipients from finishing their projects is not a cost-effective or efficient approach to governance and is irresponsible stewardship of Congressionally appropriated taxpayer dollars.

Other projects, such as programs that partner with farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners in over half of Oregon's 36 counties – including in Baker, Coos, Crook, Douglas, Grant, Jefferson, Klamath, Lake, Malheur, Morrow, Polk, Umatilla, Union, and Wheeler counties – to confront the challenges of drought and other extreme weather events have had the rug pulled out from under

them. These landowners have already started projects amounting to tens of millions in investments to build operational and environmental resiliency into our food systems by implementing innovative production practices, increasing market competitiveness, and supporting local manufacturing.

Other longer-term grants for wildfire resiliency through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program, such as a \$22.25 million investment for work in Jackson County, has also been frozen. This has paused vital work to help ensure local landowners can not only recover from past devastating wildfires but are able to protect their neighbors and communities from future wildfires.

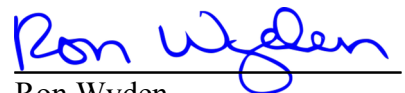
Grant recipients are expecting reimbursement or payment for projects already underway and instead have been met with the message that their projects were either being paused or completely stopped. Many of these recipients are now scared to come forward for fear of further retribution and loss of vital federal support.

While there are reports that some funds have been released, in accordance with the Constitution and federal law, we direct you to immediately release all funds under these grants to ensure these projects stay on schedule, on budget, and preserve jobs. Further, we direct you to stop these senseless firings and restore these dedicated public servants to their jobs to enhance our agriculture industry, protect food safety, and bolster jobs in rural communities and throughout Oregon.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator