

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6000
202-224-2035

April 7, 2022

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Mr. Secretary:

As Russia's relentless attack on Ukraine continues to cause devastating reverberations across the world, particularly in developing countries, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and its partners must act to limit the impact of looming global food insecurity while simultaneously supporting U.S. producers' ability to fill expected needs. The 2023 growing season is likely to be plagued by compounded concerns resulting in uncertainty facing global commodity markets and food security for the foreseeable future, underscoring the importance of the Administration taking strategic action now.

We must consider the impact of supply shortages on global food security. Prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, food commodity prices were already elevated due to tighter global supplies, widespread drought, poor crop conditions, pandemic-related supply chain disruptions, and labor shortages. Higher input prices for crop protection tools and fertilizers whose components are sourced from this war-torn region and rising costs of fuel and transportation further compounded food price inflation domestically and around the world. Just last month the United Nations reported record-high global food prices. Similarly, food price inflation in the U.S. is the highest in decades.

Following Russia's invasion, it's estimated that the production of spring-planted crops like corn, soybeans, and sunflowers could fall by as much as 50%. Should the conflict persist, the effective blockade of shipping routes out of Ukrainian ports will make it more difficult and costly for Ukraine's farmers to supply their products to the global market. This reality will continue to disproportionately impact food availability in geographic areas that already face the highest rates of food insecurity in the world.

In 2022, an estimated 323 million people will be at risk of food insecurity due to economic turmoil, displacement, lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and continued uncertainty surrounding the situation in Ukraine. Furthermore, the World Food Programme estimates that more than 44 million people around the world are on the brink of famine.

The international food assistance programs at USDA are heavily supported by donated food commodities grown in the U.S. The McGovern-Dole Program has used U.S. agriculture commodities to establish school meal programs and help combat food insecurity among children in developing countries. Monetizing donated commodities like rice, soybeans, and wheat under the Food for Progress Program has helped improve the agriculture sectors and address hunger and malnutrition in these countries.

While many of these development programs have aided in reducing global hunger, the emergency we face today outpaces the scope of that work. I applaud USDA for working in partnership with the U.S. Agency for International Development to use the funds of the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust to address this humanitarian food crisis.

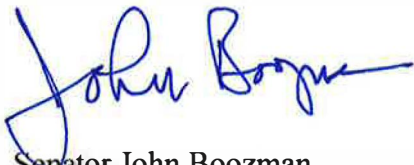
In the meantime, we must work to develop a plan for the coming food supply shortage leading up to the fall harvest of our spring-planted crops. To that end I request information on how:

- USDA will ensure U.S. producers have access to necessary resources to meet the increased global demand;
- USDA plans to work across federal agencies to prepare for the anticipated food shortages from decreased production in Ukraine, record-high production costs, and disrupted supply chains; and
- USDA will engage other federal agencies to ensure a coordinated plan that ensures regulatory actions, such as those pursued by the Food and Drug Administration and the Environmental Protection Agency pertaining to animal medicines and crop protection tools for example, will not result in a net decrease in food and commodity yields.

Due to the extraordinary nature of these events please provide me and my staff with regular written updates on USDA's efforts no less than every two weeks.

As we face this unprecedented food crisis, it is vital that the U.S. government work nimbly and to the best use of U.S. taxpayer dollars. We stand willing to support those efforts in Congress and on behalf of American producers. I look forward to a prompt response regarding USDA's efforts to assist in addressing global food insecurity.

Sincerely,



Senator John Boozman