

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 18, 2021

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

As senators representing agriculture-producing states, we write to express our serious concerns with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) COVID-19 vaccination mandate and its potential impact on the delivery of services for farmers and ranchers in our states.

While vaccines remain our most effective tool to combat COVID-19 and end the public health emergency, we strongly believe that individuals should be able to make medical decisions in consultation with their health care providers. Despite this, on September 9, 2021, President Biden announced Executive Order 14043 entitled, "Requiring Coronavirus Disease 2019 Vaccination for Federal Employees", which directed federal agencies to implement COVID-19 vaccination requirements for all of its federal employees. As you are aware, on September 22, 2021, USDA subsequently announced that all Farm Service Agency (FSA) State and County Committee members and Advisors, with limited exemptions, would be required to be vaccinated against COVID-19. According to a separate guidance memo released by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), all civil service employees, including FSA employees, must be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 by November 22, 2021, or face "disciplinary measures, up to and including removal or termination from Federal service."

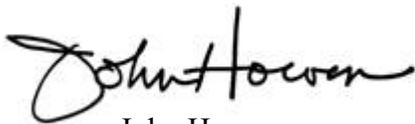
Following the president's Executive Order and the subsequent USDA and OPM memos, we have heard concerns from our constituents that the vaccination requirement will negatively impact USDA's ability to carry out its essential functions. The potential termination of thousands of USDA employees will have sweeping impacts across the Department, from the inspectors who ensure the safety of our nation's food supply to the firefighters working tirelessly to contain wildfires across the west. According to the feedback we have received from our constituents, FSA county offices, already severely understaffed and overworked, will be among the hardest hit should the mandate go into effect. At a time when producers are counting on the agency to deliver disaster relief, essential farm programs, and more, terminating employees for failing to comply with this mandate will be highly detrimental to farm country.

Additionally, stakeholders have raised concerns about the potential impacts a reduced number of federal food safety inspectors would have on regulated meat and poultry establishments. These establishments cannot operate without USDA inspectors on the premises. If there is a sudden and reduced food safety inspector workforce, some establishments may be forced to halt or severely curtail operations. Such actions would have negative implications as market-ready

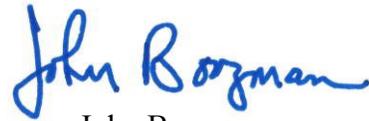
livestock and poultry back up in the supply chain due to a lack of processing capacity, and increased prices for meat and poultry products would again occur. Farmers, ranchers, and consumers would all be negatively impacted under such circumstances.

We request USDA reconsider this heavy-handed requirement and evaluate alternatives that protect employees while ensuring USDA is able to fulfill its mission to support hard-working farmers and ranchers. Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



John Hoeven
U.S. Senator



John Boozman
U.S. Senator



Roger Marshall, M.D.
U.S. Senator



Jerry Moran
U.S. Senator



Bill Hagerty
U.S. Senator



Kevin Cramer
U.S. Senator



James M. Inhofe
U.S. Senator



Steve Daines
U.S. Senator



James Lankford
U.S. Senator



Ted Cruz
U.S. Senator



Mike Crapo
U.S. Senator



Bill Cassidy, M.D.
U.S. Senator



Richard Burr
U.S. Senator



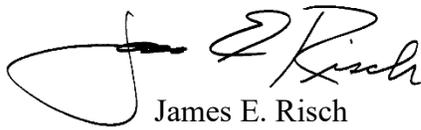
John Cornyn
U.S. Senator



Josh Hawley
U.S. Senator



Thom Tillis
U.S. Senator



James E. Risch
U.S. Senator



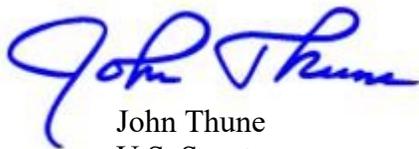
Joni K. Ernst
U.S. Senator



Deb Fischer
U.S. Senator



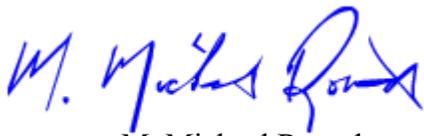
Mike Braun
U.S. Senator



John Thune
U.S. Senator



Tom Cotton
U.S. Senator



M. Michael Rounds
U.S. Senator



Ben Sasse
U.S. Senator