May 8th, 2020

Dear Chairmen Hoeven and Bishop and Ranking Members Merkley and Fortenberry:

We are writing as a diverse coalition of industries representing airlines and airport infrastructure, agriculture, aquaculture, conservation, and state, county and city municipal services who support and depend on the work of the United States Department of Agriculture’s Wildlife Services Program (USDA/WS).

USDA/WS has two critical mission areas; to protect the food supply chain and protect human health. USDA/WS protects our nation’s food supply chain by providing support to control and eradicate predation on livestock, aquaculture, and wildlife. They provide support to row crop farmers, grain growers and dairies. Additionally, they conduct work on feral hogs and many other invasive species across the nation, and at our ports of entry, that are a concern for spreading zoonotic pathogens. Their mission to protect human health is achieved through the mitigation of air traffic hazards (bird strikes and others), preventing the spread of rabies along the southern border, and protecting the critical drinking water infrastructure that hundreds of millions of Americans rely on daily. USDA/WS is truly America’s first line of defense in protecting our citizens against wildlife damage to critical infrastructure.

USDA/WS is funded by Congress through annual appropriations, which combined with matching dollars from cooperators allows them to accomplish this broad mission. These cooperators are primarily state, county and municipal entities; but also include predator control districts and other private entities. Together, cooperators make up 50% of USDA/WS annual program funds.

Our concern is that the COVID-19 pandemic has stressed the budgets of these cooperators and that will have a detrimental effect on their ability to continue to support USDA/WS mission when we need them most to provide continuity. The airport wildlife hazard mitigation is fully funded by cooperators and the Federal Aviation Administration. This sector of the economy has been
particularly hard hit. State, counties and municipalities are reeling from the loss of tax revenue at all levels coupled with the need to divert already limited resources to emergency response and aid for their residents. Livestock, aquaculture and crop producers are feeling the pinch of a market crash from upended supply chains, the closure of food service and disrupted international trade.

During this pandemic, we have all worked to respond to the immediate needs of our respective industries and have greatly appreciated the support of Congress. Throughout this, we have continued to find unexpected and unanticipated challenges during what has been a previously unfathomable event of shutting down an entire nation and global economic leader to save lives. We ask that you consider providing additional program funding to USDA/WS to help bridge the gap of the loss of cooperator funding for this vital program.

Thank you for your leadership through these challenging times.

Sincerely,

Air Line Pilots Association, Int’l
American Dairy Goat Association
American Farm Bureau Federation
American Goat Federation
American Sheep Industry Association
American Veterinary Medical Association
Animal Health Institute
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Catfish Farmers of America
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Exotic Wildlife Association
Fur Industries of North America
Livestock Marketing Association
National Aquaculture Association
National Association of Federal Veterinarians
Alabama Cattlemen’s Association
Association of Oregon Counties
California Cattlemen's Association
California Farm Bureau Federation
California Wool Growers Association
Colorado Wool Growers Association
Delta Council
Florida Cattlemen’s Association
Florida Tropical Fish Farms Association
Georgia Agribusiness Council Inc
Hawaii Aquaculture and Aquaponics Association
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation
Idaho Wool Growers Association
Independent Beef Association of North Dakota
Independent Cattlemen's Association of Texas
Indiana Sheep Association
Kentucky Aquaculture Association
Maine Aquaculture Association
Massachusetts Federation of Sheep Associations
Michigan Aquaculture Association
Minnesota Lamb and Wool Producer Association
National Association of State Departments of Agriculture
National Cattlemen's Beef Association
National Lamb Feeders Association
National Milk Producers Federation
National Pork Producers Council
Northwest Aquaculture Alliance
Public Lands Council
Rural and Agriculture Council of America
Safari Club International
Society for Range Management
U.S. Cattlemen's Association
USA Rice
Wild Sheep Foundation