March 26, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
Secretary of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

The nation’s hog farmers are committed to providing a continuous, uninterrupted supply of pork products to American kitchens notwithstanding the serious labor challenges which have plagued our industry both on farm and in plant for many years.

Even before COVID-19 struck, the U.S. pork industry faced a severe labor shortage and a longstanding dependence on foreign workers to care for our animals and to help staff our plants. COVID-19 is exacerbating what is already a major industry challenge.

The recent decision to halt visa processing at our consulates has caused great concern throughout our industry. We are particularly concerned about access to workers made available through TN visas for agricultural professions from Mexico. Last year, there were only about 21,000 TN visas issued, with agricultural professions only accounting for a portion of that. Although this is a small number compared to the over 200,000 H-2A visas issued, specialized TN professionals with key skills, including animal breeders, animal scientists and veterinarians are critical to the operation of U.S. hog farms. While there is some use of H-2A workers in the pork industry, the year-round operations of hog farms prevent us from utilizing this program in any significant way because of its seasonal limitations.

The following examples, drawn from input from pork producers across the country, illustrate the U.S. pork industry’s dependence on these programs:

“*We have come to rely on the TN program to fill employment gaps in specialized positions on our sow farms across the state.*”

“*Nearly 40 percent of our sow farm employees are TN workers.*”

“*After three years of growth, we have additional open positions on our sow farms that we have been unable to completely fill with domestic workers.*”

“*We are in the midst of an aggressive recruitment push of TN workers to provide business stability and continuity in the midst of trade uncertainty.*”

“*Every two weeks, we provide training and onboarding for 9-10 new TN visa workers arriving from Mexico.*”

“*We currently have 67 open positions on our sow farms.*”

“*We have close to 100 TN visa employees, almost 46 percent of our on-farm workers, many of which are traveling in the next few weeks to renew. They’ve received notification about consulates cancelling immigrant and non-immigrant visa appointments.*”
While we work toward long-term solutions to the labor issues facing the pork industry, we cannot afford to lose access to the TN labor pool. It is important that processing of this relatively small, but critically important category of visas continues.

U.S. pork producers cannot telecommute and are on the front lines of keeping the food supply plentiful and uninterrupted. We are committed to upholding our special responsibility to meet the nation’s needs. We ask for your help in making sure we can uphold this commitment.

Sincerely,

Howard A.V. Roth
President, National Pork Producers Council
Pork Producer, Wauzeka, Wisconsin