

September 22, 2023

The Honorable Thomas Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SE
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Mr. Secretary:

On behalf of the U.S. livestock and meat industries, we respectfully request that Livestock Mandatory Reporting (LMR) be continued in the event of a government shutdown. LMR, managed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), is a critical source of market information regarding livestock sales to packers and the subsequent sale of meat products. LMR data helps ensure livestock producers have reliable and accurate information when making critical business decisions and supports competition and transparency in the industry. Failure to continue publishing reports will jeopardize swine, cattle, and lamb producers' ability to effectively market their livestock.

Since the LMR program was established in 2001, it has become a crucial source of information on swine, cattle, lamb, and related meat product transactions. AMS uses data packers submit on the purchase and sale of livestock and meat products to publish over 300 market reports a week on price trends, supply and demand, and more – all while preserving the confidentiality of specific transactions. As a reliable, trustworthy, and freely available source of data, these reports are often used in livestock and meat marketing decisions, as well as in risk management tools.

Livestock contracts are often based on prices reported under LMR and a disruption to LMR could have adverse effects on farms – especially small family farms – potentially pushing some out of business. LMR captures the overwhelming majority of the beef, pork, and lamb industry, as well as the markets for cattle, hogs, and sheep. Any interruption to LMR could negatively affect livestock markets, supply chains, and the rural communities that depend on these industries.

We recognize that, under current law, authority for the LMR program will expire along with federal funding on September 30, 2023. However, we encourage AMS to continue LMR reporting on a voluntary basis if reporting entities continue to provide information. Such a practice would be consistent with previous lapse in LMR authority and would ensure that all industry sectors maintain essential access to critical market reports.

Given the substantial harm that will occur if LMR is disrupted, we respectfully request that AMS personnel directly involved in the operation and administration of the LMR program be deemed essential in the event of a federal government shutdown in order to continue operation of this indispensable program. This approach is not unprecedented because during the government shutdown of 2018-2019 Market News support staff were excepted from furlough and allowed to continue LMR reporting and related programming. We request USDA take a similar approach in the event of a lapse in appropriations.

Respectfully,

American Farm Bureau Federation
American Sheep Industry Association
National Cattlemen's Beef Association
National Pork Producers Council
North American Meat Institute