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April 6, 2020

The Honorable Jerry Costello  
Acting Director of Agriculture  
Illinois Dept. of Agriculture  
801 E. Sangamon Avenue  
Springfield, IL 62702

Director Costello,

As our country bands together to battle the COVID-19 crisis, Illinois' cattle farmers are doing their part to ensure food security by caring for cattle. Providing beef to the consumer is important during this time to illustrate that we won't go hungry. Illinoisans have shown over the past three weeks they find comfort in cooking all their favorite beef dishes. Ensuring the meat cases are full in the retail grocery stores gives a sense of normalcy during these trying times.

Keeping the meat case full is only possible if workers throughout the beef supply chain do their parts. Executive Order 2020-10 identifies food production as essential infrastructure and more specifically defines the food, beverage, and cannabis production and agriculture sector as encompassing "food and beverage manufacturing, production, processing, and cultivation, including farming, livestock, fishing, baking, and other production agriculture, including cultivation, marketing, production, and distribution of animals and goods for consumption; licensed medical and adult use cannabis dispensaries and licensed cannabis cultivation centers; and businesses that provide food, shelter, and other necessities of life for animals, including animal shelters, rescues, shelters, kennels, and adoption facilities".

We are thankful to the thousands of workers that are on the job to help take our cattle and ultimately put beef in the grocery stores. However, we are seeing more examples of workers calling in sick to their packing plant jobs due to fear. We understand fear, but if these essential workers don't report to their jobs, we will jeopardize our food security, strain the resources needed to keep cattle that otherwise would be harvested, and have a substantial negative impact on the cattle market and the financial health of our state's cattle farmers. Therefore, we ask that you inform Governor Pritzker of the serious strain that is occurring in our food supply chain and work to send a message to essential food workers that it's important they report to work and play their part in helping feed our country. It is critical to ensuring our food security.

Sincerely,

Ruel "Buzz" Iliff  
President  
Illinois Beef Association