

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 17, 2023

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

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

As Members of Congress from the Pacific Northwest, we write to urge you to maintain a level playing field within the Acer Access and Development (Acer) Program. The Acer Program can play a pivotal role in fostering innovation and resilience in the maple syrup industry nationally, and projects enhancing the use of various species of maple trees are critical to long-term sustainability of maple-based products in the United States.

The Acer Program has been fundamental to the success of the burgeoning maple syrup industry in the Pacific Northwest. Growers throughout our region are producing maple syrup from native big leaf maples or *Acer macrophyllum*. Our constituents are entering this industry with the vital support of the Acer Program.

Unfortunately, the Acer Program Request for Applications (RFA) published on March 1, 2023, includes language that may exclude maple growers in the Pacific Northwest from accessing resources available from Acer's research and development partnerships with universities. In the Purpose section of the RFA, the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) indicates that the agency "may prioritize funding for applications that support the promotion of research and education, natural resource responsibility, and market development and promotion, and that are from regions with sufficient distribution of *Acer saccharum* to support a commercially viable maple syrup industry".<sup>1</sup> We urge you to remove this language and instead focus on implementing the Acer program with a level playing field for all species of maple trees.

Sugar maple trees, or *Acer saccharum*, are already the predominant tree in use by most maple syrup producers in the United States.<sup>2</sup> But these trees are not native to the Pacific Northwest; here we have big leaf maple trees. Prioritizing research and development activities to the established industry could exclude growers and syrup producers from many parts of the country and prevent them from accessing technical assistance and support under Acer. For example, red maple trees or *Acer rubrum* are native to several regions of the United States that also lack sugar maples but are, like big leaf maples, potentially usable for maple syrup production. Further, relying solely on a single species of maple tree could make the domestic maple syrup industry

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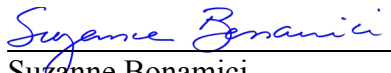
<sup>1</sup> [Acer Program RFA, Section 1.2 – March 1, 2023](#)

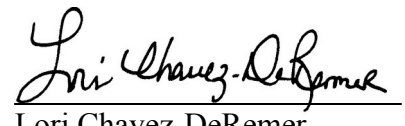
<sup>2</sup> [Maple Syrup – Climate Change Resource Center](#)


vulnerable to widespread blight, invasive species, or parasites. Additionally, limiting opportunities to the parts of the country with established and widespread maple syrup producing trees runs contrary to the Acer Program's goal of innovation.

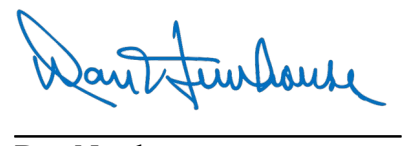
Removing preference language for any particular species or region within the Acer Program will reestablish parity and continue Acer's legacy of helping new growers expand the maple syrup industry. We appreciate your commitment to support all producers and your attention to this matter.

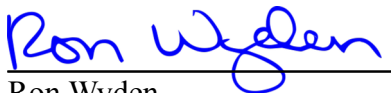
Sincerely,

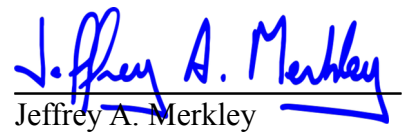
  
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Member of Congress


  
Lori Chavez-DeRemer  
Member of Congress

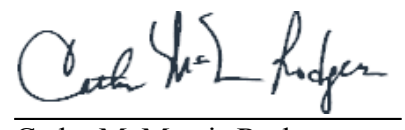
  
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Ron Wyden  
United States Senator

  
Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator

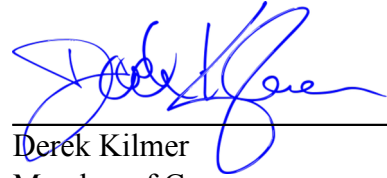
  
Earl Blumenauer  
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Member of Congress



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Andrea Salinas  
Member of Congress



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Marie Gluesenkamp Perez  
Member of Congress



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Val Hoyle  
Member of Congress

Cc: Administrator Bruce Summers