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Industry reacts to Trump's ag secretary nominee

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President-elect Donald J. Trump will officially nominate former Georgia Gov. Sonny Perdue for secretary of agriculture, multiple news outlets reported Jan. 19, rounding out the new administration's cabinet a day before inauguration.

Perdue, who is no relation to the family that runs the Perdue Farms chicken enterprise, served as a state senator in Georgia before being elected governor in 2003 — the first republican governor in 130 years. He would replace Tom Vilsack, who served as secretary of agriculture since 2009.



Sonny Perdue

As governor of Georgia, Perdue enacted strict food-safety regulations after a deadly salmonella

outbreak was traced to peanut butter from Georgia.

As head of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Perdue would oversee around 100,000 employees and administer a budget of approximately \$140 billion spread across multiple programs. He also would be charged with formulating the 2018 farm bill.

"We're excited to have such a distinguished candidate from Georgia be nominated as secretary of agriculture," said Susan A. Waters, executive director of the Vidalia Onion Committee. "Having grown up on a farm, Sonny Perdue has not only a good understanding but the right qualifications to assist and support farmers. We think he'll be a great asset for the agricultural industry."

"We support the nomination of former Georgia Gov. Sonny Perdue as secretary of agriculture and congratulate him on gaining the confidence of President-elect Trump," Tom Nassif, Western Growers president and chief executive officer, said in a statement. "Over the course of Gov. Perdue's career, he has proven to be a consummate champion for agriculture and will undoubtedly serve our industry well in this capacity. We look forward to working with the governor to develop and implement the public policy priorities of the fresh produce industry."

"While the secretary's importance to agriculture is obvious, Gov. Perdue will assume the role at a particularly vital time as our country reengages in a discussion about the future of our immigration system," Nassif said. "Reform is essential to the long-term viability of American agriculture, which is unique among industries that rely on foreign workers in that our labor needs cannot be met by domestic workers. Foreign hands will harvest our crops, either here or abroad. It is our hope that once confirmed, Governor Perdue will be a relentless advocate for immigration reform that works for agriculture and will present our case to the president, other key cabinet members and members of Congress who will be engaged in future negotiations."

"We congratulate Gov. Perdue on his selection as the next secretary of agriculture. We have high regards for this past work with our Georgia fruit and vegetable industry, and are confident he will bring a passion and commitment to supporting agriculture, and helping us deliver healthy foods to all Americans," Tom Stenzel, United Fresh president and CEO, said in a release. "We anticipate meeting with Gov. Perdue soon, and working with him on critical issues such as securing an adequate workforce through immigration reform and a new guest worker program, bolstering free and fair trade, serving the neediest Americans through federal feeding programs and more. "

"We look forward to working with him once the nominee is confirmed," said Kathy Means, PMA's vice president of industry relations. "Produce and floral are critical to the ag economy as well as trade, and we stand ready to help in the transition and the work ahead. It's encouraging to have an ag secretary from a state like Georgia, with such a diverse ag sector, including a strong fruit and vegetable industry."

Charles Hall, executive director of the Georgia Fruit & Vegetable Association, based in LaGrange, said, "We're very pleased that former Georgia Governor Perdue is the designee for secretary of agriculture. He is involved in agriculture himself and is very familiar with what's going on with different types of agriculture. With the various different types of crops and production we have in Georgia, he will have a great background to help the produce industry."

Hall added that he hoped Perdue would continue the advancements that have made in the farm bill with respect to specialty crop research funding and block grants.

Additionally, he said, “When he was governor, he was very open and accessible, and I feel good that we’ll have a very open secretary for all agriculture, especially the specialty crop industry.”

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