

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House of Representatives
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Madame Speaker and Leader Schumer,

On behalf of our millions of members and supporters across the country, we are writing to urge you to prioritize family-scale producers and local and regional food systems in Congress' efforts to provide relief for those affected by the COVID-19 virus.

Last year, USDA paid farmers tens of billions of dollars in trade relief. These payments went primarily to support large-scale operations growing crops for export, fuel, animal feed, and processed goods rather than family farmers and ranchers that feed local communities.

In this time of crisis where farmers and food businesses are needing to quickly adapt to stay afloat, one-time payments that predominantly help corporate agribusiness will not sufficiently protect local, resilient food systems that are needed now more than ever to feed American communities.

Instead, we urge Congress to direct the majority of aid to family-scale producers, producers of color, beginning farmers, specialty crop and livestock producers, small food businesses, and local emergency food relief efforts.

Furthermore, small and family-scale producers often lack the resources and the expertise to apply for disaster relief programs and fail to receive adequate compensation. Even when they do, payments are often grossly inadequate to cover operating costs.

Small and mid-scale farmers face a variety of economic barriers that cannot be overcome solely with one-time payments. Farmers are currently in tremendous debt and facing extremely low prices for their commodities. Unprecedented consolidation has left small-scale producers with even greater difficulty finding markets for their goods.

We therefore urge Congress to impose important restrictions on the Credit Commodity Corporation's power to provide direct disaster relief payments. We urge Congress to examine the systemic agriculture pricing issues that have forced family-scale farms to operate below their cost of production for years, making them particularly economically vulnerable. And we urge Congress to take preemptive action to limit further consolidation in the agriculture and fisheries sectors in this period of crisis.

Congress must ensure that COVID-19-related disaster relief packages do not support the status quo of consolidation and income inequality. Further payments to large-scale operations that ignore family farmers will only exacerbate rural inequality and the enormous economic stress America's farming communities are already facing.

To protect local and regional food systems and ensure that family-scale producers can feed their communities, we urge Congress to:

- 1) **Provide direct payments to farmers, ranchers, and fishermen whose markets have been dislodged as a result of COVID-19, resulting in a loss of income. Cap per-operation direct disaster relief payments to \$500,000 and prioritize small and mid-sized operations, limited resource producers, specialty crop producers, and farms operated by farmers of color and tribal nations for both disaster payments and targeted commodity purchases.**

These farmers, ranchers, fishermen, and food businesses are crucial to the resilience of our food system in this time of disaster but are historically underserved by existing USDA programs and disaster-relief payments. If small and medium-scale producers are to support their local and regional food systems, they must receive their fair share of direct payments from the Commodity Credit Corporation.

Furthermore, in a time where our healthcare system is in crisis, it is more important than ever that Americans are eating healthfully in accordance with the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. That means ensuring production of and consumer access to more fresh fruits and vegetables, as opposed to further subsidizing processed foods and factory-farmed animal products.

- 2) **Immediately forgive all federal direct and guaranteed loan debt and suspend debt payments (both interest and principal) for two years for all producers. Implement zero interest operating loans for all family-scale farmers, ranchers, and fishermen.**

America's small and medium-scale farmers are under a tremendous amount of debt. The loss of markets and disruption of supply chains associated with the COVID-19 virus makes it tremendously difficult for family farmers to keep up with debt payments.

Immediate debt relief will help family farmers focus on what matters most: maintaining local and regional food systems and feeding communities.

- 3) **Increase funding for USDA Local Agriculture Marketing Program (LAMP) by \$200,000,000 and temporarily waive cost-share requirements to make local food systems more resilient.**

LAMP supports the physical infrastructure, marketing and coordination of local food economies, while prioritizing small and mid-sized farm operations to ensure local producers have the necessary expertise and resources to feed their communities, including delivering food to school districts, hospitals, and other institutional feeding sites that may face food shortages from their larger supply chains as this crisis deepens.

LAMP can help ensure that local and regional food systems are able to remain operational in this time of crisis by providing direct assistance. Additionally, ongoing support of LAMP will assist in creating new markets will provide more opportunities for small and mid-scale producers amidst this crisis.

4) Double funding for the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (“GusNIP”) and the Fair Food Network’s Double Up Food Bucks Programs and provide \$50,000,000 to specifically cover direct sales from small and medium-scale producers.

Small-scale farmers are not the only ones in crisis. Millions of food-insecure Americans that rely on SNAP and school meal programs to feed their families often lack access to local, healthy food. On the other hand, small and medium-scale farmers often lack the ability to accept SNAP funds, further hurting a producer’s ability to feed those in need.

Significantly increasing funding for these programs will make healthy, local food more accessible while creating new opportunities for America’s farmers.

We urge you to include these critical priorities in ongoing COVID-19 relief efforts. Strengthening local and regional food systems while prioritizing small and medium-scale producers over large-scale farming operations will help communities feed themselves throughout this crisis.

While more relief is necessary in the long-term to ensure that family farmers can make a living wage while providing healthy food to their communities, these initial steps are necessary to ensure that the capacity of our small and medium-scale farmers and their distribution systems are strengthened at this crucial time.

Sincerely,

Family Farm Action
Friends of the Earth
National Family Farm Coalition

A Greener World
Agricultural Institute of Marin
Community Vision
Earthjustice
Ecology Center
Farm Aid
Fibershed
Food and Water Watch
Illinois Stewardship Alliance
Lutheran Office of Public Policy
Organization for Competitive Markets
Sustainable Agriculture (SAGE)