



STATE INNOVATION EXCHANGE AGRICULTURE

The Impact of COVID-19 on Rural Communities & Local Agriculture Talking Points

Federal Stimulus Package

The \$2 trillion federal stimulus package aims to help US businesses, hospitals, farmers, and individuals weather the ongoing economic crises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Included in the package is \$9.5 billion dollars for agricultural producers impacted by the economic outfall, including:

- producers of specialty crops,
- producers that supply local food systems, including farmers markets, restaurants, and schools,
- and livestock producers, including dairy producers.

There is concern among the sustainable agriculture and food system community that the language in the stimulus bill is too broadly written and there exist few safeguards and no guidance to USDA as to how the above funding will get to local food producers and local food system infrastructure. Information on this continues to evolve.

Farmers and local food systems are going to need additional help in the weeks ahead and when possible, states should work ***in partnership with local direct-market farmer, farmers' market, farmworker, food systems and/or hunger advocacy organizations*** ([*Don't know your local organizations? Find them here*](#)) to ensure the following:

- State aid packages have provisions to include direct payments to farmers to make up for lost income;
- Funds are provided to support farms to adapt to food distribution in the time of COVID-19 including helping to develop online shopping, on-farm farm stands and "no-touch" distributions channels;
- Funds to go land grant university extension to increase services with a specific focus on local food systems, food justice and community resiliency;
- Administrative flexibility is prioritized, allowing direct investments in various aspects of the food system such as farmers' markets and food aggregation hubs;
- Allow emergency food purchases from farmers, food hubs and small processors, as well as working to provide opportunities to ensure that food producers have access to

resources they need to produce food and provide it to local communities during these times;

- Invest in local non-profit organizations working directly with small and medium-sized farmers providing food for local communities.

State Policy Options:

- States must be working to ensure that farm stands, farmers' markets and community supported agriculture (CSAs) are considered 'essential services' and allowed to remain open during mandatory shutdowns. [California](#), [Connecticut](#), [Kentucky](#), [Maryland](#), [Oregon](#), [Pennsylvania](#) and [Wisconsin](#) [New York](#) are just some of the states that have deemed farmers' markets essential businesses.
- State eviction and foreclosure moratoriums must include provisions to protect those farmers who are unable to make land rent payments due to lost markets;
- Farmers and workers must be deemed as "essential" for the purposes of curfews, bans on gathering, travel limitations, and access to childcare;
- Mandate farm workers have access to clean water for hand-washing, soap and personal protective equipment to protect themselves and the greater public from COVID-19-exposure and transmission.