



Institute for  
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## COVID-19 STIMULUS PACKAGE FOR THE FOOD SYSTEM

Through no fault of their own, farmers, ranchers, fishermen and all food producers are facing a crisis unlike any they have ever seen, encountering new threats to their production and markets sparked by COVID-19 while they endure a multi-year slump in prices for their goods, volatile trade disputes, frequent natural disasters, and climate disruption. What's clear is that **no farmer should lose their farm and no fisherman should lose their boat because of the crisis sparked by COVID-19, and farm, fish and food workers should likewise not lose their livelihoods.**

In stark contrast to the Administration's approach to a "trade bailout" through the Market Facilitation Program, Congress and the federal government need to act decisively to ensure that all farmers, ranchers, and fishermen are included in any broader stimulus package related to COVID-19, particularly small and mid-sized operations, limited resource producers, farms operated by farmers of color, and tribal nations who have often fallen through the cracks of federal farm policy. This will require a multi-faceted approach that invests in the innovative potential of food producers, ensures fair livelihoods for all who have a hand in bringing food to American families, offers meaningful debt relief and appropriate credit to meet the demands of the moment, and ensures a more resilient food system for producers, workers and consumers alike.

Time is of the essence.

**We call on the President, the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, and the Secretary of Commerce to declare a national disaster in both the agriculture and seafood sectors** to unlock existing federal emergency and disaster funding and services, and enable Congress to appropriate further relief funds for the farm and seafood sector.<sup>1</sup> In addition, federal agencies must aggressively use every tool available to keep families in their homes, on the land, and on the water.

**Congress must do the following in any stimulus package enacted to address the COVID-19 crisis:**

### **ENSURE A FAIR LIVELIHOOD FOR FARMERS, RANCHERS, FISHERMEN AND ALL FARM, FISH AND FOOD WORKERS.**

- Establish an emergency payment program for farmers, ranchers, fishermen, and food producers who can demonstrate revenue losses due to COVID-19 emergency measures, including producers who are sourcing local and regional markets and sourcing directly to individuals, schools, local institutions, and food hubs.
- Forgive all federal direct and guaranteed loan debt and suspend debt payments (both principal and interest) for two years for all producers.
- Suspend vessel loan payments (both principal and interest) to private lenders for two years.
- Increase funding for direct and guaranteed loans, maintaining existing loan limits.
- Waive the eligibility restriction for new FSA loans based on past debt write-down or other loss to the agency.
- Waive the prohibition on refinancing of other debt with FSA direct loans.
- Implement zero-interest for all FSA direct loans and utilize the Interest Assist program to buy-down guaranteed loan interest to zero percent.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resources-fishing/frequent-questions-fishery-disaster-assistance>

- Require that all borrower rights provided for FSA direct borrowers be extended to all guaranteed loan borrowers.
- Adapt all USDA and DOC credit, funding and program implementation requirements to meet the evolving needs of food producers through measures such as extending deadlines, waiving cost-share requirements, ensuring effective outreach, or other actions.
- Provide unemployment benefits to farm, food and fish workers through businesses that can demonstrate inability to pay their workers and contractors because of COVID-19 emergency measures.
- Provide emergency funding for businesses that can demonstrate revenue losses to offer paid sick days to farm, fish and food workers who provide essential services during the COVID-19 crisis.
- Establish an immediate moratorium on work permit restrictions for guest workers and migrant workers who have been laid off or terminated.
- Provide access to free COVID-19 testing and medical care to all farm, fish and food workers, regardless of immigration status and size of workplace, including workers on H-2A or migrant worker visas, and eliminate penalties for all workers who become ill for inability to complete a contract due to the illness.

### **BOLSTER LOCAL & REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEMS POISED TO FEED COMMUNITIES**

- Quadruple the budget, loosen barriers to application, and abandon all eligibility and access restrictions to SNAP and Women, Infants and Children (WIC) programs.
- Establish an immediate moratorium on the Public Charge Rule which would disqualify immigrants who receive public assistance from obtaining permanent residency status or U.S. citizenship.
- Exempt farmers' and seafood markets and local food hubs from definitions of "public places" and categorize them as essential services, eligible for emergency assistance funding for operations and food safety training and materials, to continue feeding local communities.
- Double funding for the Fair Food Network's Double Up Food Bucks and allow program funds to cover direct sales from participating family-scale farms and boats.
- Increase funding for USDA Local Agriculture Marketing Program (LAMP) by \$200,000,000 and temporarily waive cost-share requirements to strengthen local food system resilience.
- Bolster food security for tribal nations by: 1) Providing additional funding of at least \$100 million for the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) and enhancing FDPIR for food, administration, and infrastructure, along with providing administrative flexibility; 2) Establishing an Emergency Tribal Food Assistance Fund; and 3) Directing USDA to consider ways to allow dual participation in SNAP and FDPIR simultaneously.

### **ENACT SYSTEMIC REFORM TO BUILD RESILIENCE FOR ALL FOOD PRODUCERS, WORKERS AND EATERS**

- Strengthen rural economic resilience and prevent food shortages by establishing supply management programs, a parity pricing system, and strategic food reserves that ensure producers and workers receive a living wage and consumers have access to high-quality and stable agricultural goods and seafood.
- Prohibit crisis profiteering and corporate consolidation by enacting an immediate moratorium on mergers and acquisitions in the seafood and food & agriculture sectors and enforce antitrust laws.
- Support fair agricultural contracts, producers' rights, and competitive markets by reissuing and finalizing the USDA Farmer Fair Practice Rules.
- Increase transparency in the food system and allow eaters to support American farmers, ranchers, and fishermen by reinstating and expanding mandatory Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) for meat, dairy, and seafood.