



National Farm to School Network Federal Policy Response to COVID-19

While many public spaces have been closed and our daily routines altered, National Farm to School Network's Partners, Advisors, and members across the country are working harder than ever to care for those most impacted by the COVID-19 health crisis.

This health crisis is exposing numerous inequities: millions of children who don't know where their next meal will come from, if not from school or early care; the financial barriers and structural inequities faced by small producers and producers of color; the immediate food and water shortages that Native communities as a result of the crisis. Like many small businesses, this is an incredibly difficult situation for the farmers, food producers, food hubs and others who rely on school markets as part of their business plans.

But in many places, the investments made in the relationships and infrastructure for a resilient local food system are allowing our Partners to mitigate the harm that kids, farmers and communities experience from the COVID-19 pandemic. With this in mind, federal policies should respond to this immediate emergency in ways that will advance a more just food system tomorrow.

National Farm to School Network is advocating on behalf of our 20,000+ members, and we ask that as federal policymakers develop new legislation to address the COVID-19 pandemic, they consider our requests listed below.

School meal and child nutrition programs are responding at the front lines of the COVID-19 crisis. We need to make sure they have the resources to meet the current unprecedented challenge, and to emerge stronger in the future.

- **Cover increased costs directly related to the COVID-19 epidemic.**
 - Create an emergency relief fund for schools so that they can continue to meet the needs of local residents throughout long-term school closures. These closures threaten to wipe out schools' budgets just as they are working to feed the community.
 - Include the Providing Americans Insured Days of Leave (PAID Leave) Act in a fourth stimulus bill to immediately compensate schools and child nutrition programs for offering paid sick leave to workers.
- **Support School Food Authorities (SFAs) maximum authority to convert program funds to meet current needs and increase funds as needed.**
 - Extend the nationwide waiver allowing parents and/or guardians to pick up meals for their children to include Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) snacks as well.
 - Waive the non-federal cost-share requirements for USDA Farm to School grants awarded in June 2020 and the RFA that will open in fall 2020, recognizing that



- schools, districts, nonprofits, and states will all have limited funds responding to COVID-19 and the economic recovery.
- Allow schools to elect a portion of USDA Commodity Foods to convert to cash purchase of local and regional products through the purchase method of their choice.
 - Provide bonus USDA entitlement funds to schools for DoD Fresh purchases through this summer and the 2020-21 school year.
 - Ease the administrative burden for school food service programs as they transition back in the next school year by providing additional options for school to serve meals to all children at no cost.
- **Protect and strengthen the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) as a vital resource for emergency response and long term community resources.**
 - For the duration of the COVID-19 emergency, reimburse family child care home and child care centers based on October 2019 total meals and snacks (family child care homes) or January/February 2020 per child per day average reimbursement (child care center) in order to cover fixed administrative costs.
 - Ensure total monthly administrative payments cover administrative costs of CACFP Sponsoring Organizations.
 - **Support schools as they help students learn throughout the crisis.**
 - Create Education MicroGrants for teachers, to help them pivot to support all of their students in a different environment than they've been used to.
 - Request that the next coronavirus relief package includes a significant investment in E-Rate funds for schools and libraries to provide Wi-Fi hotspots or other devices with Wi-Fi capability to students without adequate connectivity at their home.
 - **Issue further waivers that recognize the extraordinary circumstances under which SFAs are currently operating.**
 - Extend waivers beyond June 30. Direct waivers to extend for 60 days beyond the end of the current public health emergency.
 - Prevent reimbursement funding from being cut in the 2020-2021 school year by allowing schools to choose to use reimbursement data from 2018-2019.
 - Extend area eligibility waivers nationwide, with guidance on how states should apply them
 - **Recognize the role of land-grant universities as a crucial food system resource.**
 - Extension programs provide critical services for farm to school activities, such as soil testing for garden safety. Federal aid to land-grant institutions should specifically set aside funding for extension services during this crisis.

The farmers, ranchers, and fisherpeople who feed our communities need immediate aid to help them withstand this crisis and prepare for possible recurrence. Producers of color are even more at risk because of historic and ongoing discriminatory barriers. It is imperative to directly dismantle this structural inequity as part of any policy response.



- **Federal authority should use all available tools to help producers weather this crisis.**
 - Declare a two-year national moratorium on farm foreclosures and require agriculture mediation for all future farm foreclosure proceedings after that point.
 - The President and the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture should declare a national disaster to unlock existing federal emergency and disaster funding and services for the farm sector.
 - Direct USDA to utilize the authorities of the Commodity Credit Corporation Charter Act related to income stabilization to make emergency disaster payments to family-scale farmers/ranchers/fisherpeople and independent agriculture and seafood businesses (that can demonstrate revenue losses attributable to coronavirus emergency measures) to donate and distribute fresh and minimally processed foods, at market rates, directly to individuals, families, food hubs, and schools.
 - Earmark \$100 million in relief fund to aid farmers of color.
 - Adapt all USDA credit, financing, funding and other program implementation requirements to meet the evolving demands of farmers, ranchers, and fisherpeople through measures such as extending deadlines, waiving cost-share requirements, ensuring effective outreach to producers, or other actions.
 - Prepare for a possible recurrence of a public health emergency due to coronavirus, and set all policies and program guidelines to provide relief in case of such a recurrence.

- **All relief and stimulus policies should improve the racial equity and local resilience of our food system.**
 - Ensure all farmers, ranchers, and fisherpeople are included in any broader stimulus or farm relief package, with specific prioritization of small and mid-sized operations, limited resource producers, and farms operated by farmers of color and Tribal nations who are currently not well served by existing crop insurance, revenue programs, Market Facilitation Program payments.
 - Ensure that the \$9.5 billion in aid funding as part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act is equitably distributed, as outlined in [this sign-on letter](#) led by the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition.
 - Create opportunities for regional food chain initiatives by expanding financing, technical assistance, and procurement support for community owned and “socially disadvantaged” farmers, fishers, and ranchers.
 - Increase funding for USDA Local Agriculture Marketing Program (LAMP) by \$200 million and temporarily waive cost-share requirements to strengthen local food system resilience.

- **Help producers pivot to meet the current needs.**
 - Provide farmers, markets, and food hubs with the equipment and authorization to accept Pandemic-EBT. Expand Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) online ordering pilot to allow pickup options.
 - Producers serving institutional markets displaced by the epidemic should receive technical assistance and/or equipment grants to pivot to serving emergency food needs (e.g. capacity to package individually for grab and go).



- Exempt farmers' markets from definitions of "public places" and categorize them as essential services in order to continue feeding local communities.
- Extend "Good Samaritan" provisions of federal food donation laws to encourage activation of unused refrigeration capacity, refrigerated transport, and other unused infrastructure to help producers meet donation needs.

Respond to immediate needs in **Native communities** and improve food sovereignty.

- **Provide immediate emergency support.**
 - Provide immediate financial support directly to Native communities to coordinate local supply chain to meet emergency water and food shortages.
 - Establish an Emergency Tribal Food Assistance Fund.
 - Waive the non-federal cost-share requirement for Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR).
 - Allow a portion of the \$100 million in COVID-response FDPIR funds to be used for skyrocketing administrative costs.
 - Direct USDA to allow dual participation in SNAP and FDPIR simultaneously for all those eligible.
- **Build the long-term resilience and sovereignty of local food systems in Native communities.**
 - Provide funding for long-term infrastructure development to ensure access to clean water.
 - Add \$30 million into the Federally Recognized Tribes Extension Program to quickly deploy additional resources to 1862 and 1994 institutions to hire additional staff to help rebuild resiliency and provide technical support to agriculture production and community food resiliency among Tribal communities.
 - Fix the Value-Added Producer Grant Program (VAPG) to add a section ensuring that all Tribal government or Tribal community owned food businesses are fully authorized to use the VAPG program.
- **Ensure that U.S. territories, Tribal nations, and commonwealths are included in federal program expansion and funding.** Many federal assistance programs function differently or are not available in these areas.

Workers are quite literally putting themselves on the line to keep communities fed. The pay, rights, and protections that they receive must recognize that fact.

- **Support the health and safety of frontline food and farm workers during this crisis.**
 - Provide funding for protective equipment for frontline staff.
 - Legislate a minimum of 15 paid sick days per year, additional paid sick days in public health emergencies, and paid family leave, regardless of size of workplace.
 - 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.
- Recognize the role of school and child nutrition program workers as critical infrastructure, and ensure they are included in any government efforts to compensate emergency workers, such as hazard pay, direct payments or tax relief.
- **Protect the rights of food and farm workers during the COVID-19 emergency and beyond.**
 - Establish an immediate moratorium on work permit restrictions for guest workers and migrant workers who have been laid off or terminated.
 - Stand against reduced wage rates for guest workers on American farms through the H2-2A visa program.

Children and their families are being thrown into food insecurity as a result of the pandemic. Federal policies should ensure they have the resources to access healthy food and should directly address the needs of historically underserved communities.

- **Ensure robust nutrition assistance during the emergency and throughout an economic recovery.**
 - Increase SNAP benefits and suspend recently implemented SNAP barriers and time limits through the economic recovery.
 - Time any relief measures to economic recovery indicators, not just emergency declaration or a set time period in statute.