

April 8, 2020

The Honorable George Ervin “Sonny” Perdue III
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We are writing to you today to express our concerns regarding the impact the COVID-19 pandemic is having on our local and regional food systems across the country, especially on the farmers and producers who rely on local and regional direct markets. Through the social/physical distancing measures that have been, understandably, put in place, farmers are seeing their direct markets completely disrupted or in some cases evaporate all together.

Direct markets impacted include farmers markets, restaurants that center their menus on local and regional food, schools and other institutions, as well as food hubs that serve as intermediaries. The Congressional Research Service estimated local food sales at \$11.8 billion in 2017¹, creating markets for roughly 159,000 farming operations². These markets have created economic opportunity for many different farmers and producers across the country. They have also served as a pathway for young and beginning farmers, as well as for small and mid-sized farms who have transitioned away from commodity production to find economic viability.

Researchers from Colorado State University, the University of Missouri, and a former official of the USDA Local Food Research and Development, produced an analysis³ that indicates the loss due to COVID-19 for local and regional food economies could equate to more than \$1 billion over the balance of this year. As these farms grapple with the loss of their direct markets, it is critical they receive financial relief and support.

Congress has responded through the recently passed Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act (H.R. 748) by providing \$9.5 billion specifically to agriculture producers impacted by coronavirus, including “producers of specialty crops, producers that supply local food systems, including farmers markets, restaurants, and schools, and livestock producers, including dairy producers.” The philanthropic community is also responding to this crisis. Together with investors, foundations are working to create funds to assist such farms and local and regional food systems, but it will not be enough to counter the losses.

¹ Johnson, R. 2019. 2018 Farm Bill Primer: Support for Local Food Systems. Congressional Research Service Accessed: <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/IF11252.pdf>

² U.S. Department of Ag, National Ag Statistics Service, 2017 Census of Agriculture

³ Mitigating Immediate Harmful Impacts of COVID-19 on Farms and Ranches selling through Local and Regional Food Markets. Accessed: https://localfoodeconomics.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/2020_03_21_EconomicImpactLocalFood-NSAC-SEH.pdf

Therefore, we urge USDA to ensure that farmers and producers devastated by the loss of their direct, local and regional food system markets receive direct financial assistance through the CARES Act. This assistance can, we hope, enable them to withstand both the immediate and long-term impact of their financial losses. If we work together to see this through, our farmers and producers will emerge intact, and hopefully stronger and more resilient in the future.

Sincerely,

Central Appalachian Network
Chester Agricultural Center
Claneil Foundation
Dirt Capital Partners
Duke World Food Policy Center
Elizabeth R and William J Patterson Foundation
Farm Aid
Flinn Foundation
Food Animal Concerns Trust (FACT)
Food Well Alliance
Forefront
Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky
Fund for Democratic Communities
Globetrotter Foundation and the #NoRegrets Initiative
Gordon Elwood Foundation
Harp-Weaver LLC
Hunter Grubb Foundaton
Integrated Capital Investing
Johnson Ohana Foundation
Joyce and Irving Goldman Family Foundation
Kinship Foundation
Kokua Hawaii Foundation
KOL Foods
Kresge Foundation
Lawson Valentine Foundation
Liberty Prairie Foundation
Lydia B Stokes Foundation
Maryland Philanthropy Network
Merck Family Fund
Native American Agriculture Fund
Nell Newman Foundation
NextFifty Initiative
NH Community Loan Fund
Northwest Area Foundation
NoVo Foundation
Rachel's Network

Stupski Foundation
Sustainable Agriculture and Food System Funders
Swift Foundation
The 11th Hour Project
The Builders Initiative
The Casey and Family Foundation
The Conservation Fund
The John Merck Fund
The LDC
The Lumpkin Family Foundation
The Marcus Foundation
The Merchants Fund
The Sandy River Charitable Foundation
Thornburg Foundation
Threadspan
Tundra Glacier Fund
Ulupono Initiative
Vatheuer Family Foundation
Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund
Vitalyst Health Foundation
Wallace Center at Winrock International
Walter Mander Foundation
WhyHunger
WKF Fund