

DEEP DIVE

BASIC NEEDS: FOOD

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THE CRISIS AND THE OPPORTUNITY: OUR FOOD SYSTEM IN 2020

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BASIC NEEDS: THE CRISIS AND THE OPPORTUNITY—OUR FOOD SYSTEM IN 2020

The Center for Good Food Purchasing was founded to expand the Good Food Purchasing Program nationally through a coordinated, multi-sector coalition of public, private and civil society organizations. The Center builds support for adoption of the Program by institutions in cities around the U.S., and provides intensive technical support to institutions to translate assessment findings into a roadmap to identify purchasing targets in each of five value categories, combined with short- and long-term strategies to achieve institution goals.

The Center partners in this work with local and national leaders and public institutions that provide food to low-income and at-risk communities and works with them to direct their purchasing power to improve human and environmental health, particularly for Communities of Color; to support fair labor practices, health, and well-being for farm and food-systems workers; to create opportunities for mid-sized regional food producers and producers of color; and to support high welfare standards for farm animals. The pre-COVID-19 state of the US food system: in need of a 21st century renovation. The mid-20th Century was a turning point in the American food system, ushering in a precipitous decline in farm populations (“a ‘free fall’ situation leading us to ‘trauma’” stated former USDA demographer Calvin Beale¹) as farms consolidated toward large scale operations. With this shift toward highly consolidated, vertically integrated

and industrially efficient agriculture came a rise in obesity,² a loss of agricultural biodiversity, and a rise in nitrate pollution and greenhouse gas emissions due to concentrated methods of farming and animal rearing.³

Before the midpoint of the twentieth century, the lowest income Americans had the healthiest diets, with a national obesity rate of around 12 percent.⁴ There was more diversification of farm ownership and type: around 40 percent of the US workforce was in agriculture, and there were over six million farms.⁵

In the second half of the twentieth century, the obesity rate climbed to 60 percent, and agriculture became consolidated: now less than 2 percent of the workforce is in agriculture, and less than two million farms, while average farm size increased over 60 percent and agricultural output tripled and became increasingly specialized.⁶ In the meat sector, over that same time frame, meat supply consolidated into just four companies.⁷

Much of it is causally attributed to the Cold War era of American economic expansion, a political layer built on the post World War II use of military chemicals for farmland fertilizer, ushering in the age of agricultural industrialization.⁸ Other factors often cited include corporate consolidation, federal subsidies supporting

1 United States Department of Agriculture. A Time to Choose: Summary Report on the Structure of Agriculture. U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, 1981, https://archive.org/stream/timetochoosesummoounit/timetochoosesummoounit_djvu.txt. Accessed 17 June 2020.

2 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “Adult Obesity Facts”. Overweight & Obesity. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 27 February 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/adult.html>. Accessed 17 June 2020.

3 Ben Lilliston, Latest agriculture emissions data show rise of factory farms (Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, March 26, 2019, <https://www.iatp.org/blog/201904/latest-agriculture-emissions-data-show-rise-factory-farms>. Accessed 17 June 2020.

4 Ogden, Cynthia L., et al. Prevalence of Overweight, Obesity, and Extreme Obesity Among Adults: United States, Trends 1960–1962 Through 2007–200. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, June 2010, https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hestat/obesity_adult_07_08/obesity_adult_07_08.pdf. Accessed 17 June 2020.

5 Dimitri, Carolyn, et al. “The 20th Century Transformation of U.S. Agriculture and Farm Policy.” Economic Information Bulletin, Number 3, United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, June 2005, https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/44197/13566_eib3_1_.pdf?v=7007. Accessed 17, June 2020

6 *Ibid*

7 Ostland, Emilene. “The Big Four Meat Packers.” High Country News, 21 March 2011, <https://www.hcn.org/issues/43.5/cattlemen-struggle-against-giant-meatpackers-and-economic-squeezes/the-big-four-meatpackers-1>. Accessed 13 June 2020.

8 Pollan, Michael, What’s Eating America (Smithsonian, June 15, 2006). Accessed at <https://michaelpollan.com/articles-archive/whats-eating-america/>; retrieved. June 13, 2020

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commodity marketing,⁹ as well as aggressive food marketing.¹⁰

Our food system is an economic system managed mostly by a handful of large companies driven by a shareholder obligation to produce profit. Ten multinational companies now control most of the global food system.¹¹ While some of them are now recognizing the need to evolve their business practices consistent with United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, there remains little room in the prevailing economic imperative for the complexity of fair economic relationships. Food that isn't "standard" to support the efficiencies of scale, marketing and logistics, often gets wasted.¹² Cheapness" depends on low wage and often exploited labor,¹³ and highly processed, manufactured food is a known contributor to chronic health problems.¹⁴ And, with climate change creating extremes in weather as well as pest and disease proliferation, agriculture based on monoculture cropping is at risk.¹⁵

Olivier De Schutter, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, serving from 2008-2014, wrote in his January 2014 final [report to the United Nations](#):¹⁶

"Most stakeholders agree, in general terms, on the urgent need for reform. Measured against the requirement that they should contribute to the realization of the right to food, the food systems we have inherited from the twentieth century have failed. Of course, significant progress has been achieved in boosting agricultural production over the past fifty years. But this has hardly reduced the number of hungry people, and the nutritional outcomes remain poor."

9 *Op. cit.*, Dimitri. *The 20th Century Transformation of U.S. Agriculture and Farm Policy*

10 Chandon, Pierre, and Brian Wansink. Does food marketing need to make us fat? A review and solutions. *Nutrition Reviews*, 4 October 2012, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3495296/>. Accessed 17 June 2020

11 Taylor, Kate. "These Ten Companies Control Everything You Buy." *Business Insider*, 28 September 2016, <https://www.businessinsider.com/10-companies-control-the-food-industry-2016-9?op=1>. Accessed 13 June 2020.

12 *An Economic Analysis of Food Waste Solutions*. ReFED, <https://www.refed.com/analysis?sort=economic-value-per-ton>. Accessed 17 June 2020.

13 Food Chain Workers Alliance. *The Hands That Feed Us: Challenges and Opportunities For Workers Along the Food Chain*. Food Chain Workers Alliance, 6 June 2012, <https://foodchainworkers.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Hands-That-Feed-Us-Report.pdf>. Accessed 17 June 2020.

14 Bahadoran, Zahra, et al. Fast Food Pattern and Cardiometabolic Disorders: A Review of Current Studies. *Health Promot Perspect.*, 30 January 2016, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26933642/>. Accessed 17 June 2020

15 *Climate Change and Land: An IPCC Special Report on climate change, desertification, land degradation, sustainable land management, food security, and greenhouse gas fluxes in terrestrial ecosystems*. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2020, <https://www.ipcc.ch/srccl/>. Accessed 17 June 2020.

16 De Schutter, Olivier. "Final report: The transformative potential of the right to food," Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food. United Nations General Assembly, 24 January 2014, http://www.srfood.org/images/stories/pdf/officialreports/20140310_finalreport_en.pdf. Accessed 17 June 2020.

17 Fraser, Evan, and Elizabeth Fraser. "10 Things You Need to Know About the Global Food System." *The Guardian*, 1 May 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/food-blog/10-things-need-to-know-global-food-system>. Accessed 17 June 2020.

In other words, according to many, the food system is in need of a redesign and the pre-COVID-19 status quo of the global food system was "deeply inequitable."¹⁷

It has been propped up on a bubble of growth and global export that is unsustainable from the standpoint of human and planetary well-being.

FOOD SYSTEM REDESIGN EFFORTS

Recognizing the urgent need for re-designing the food system, over 200 cities around the world have signed the [Milan Urban Food Policy Pact](#) since its launch in early 2014. The Pact acknowledges that:

"...current food systems are being challenged to provide permanent and reliable access to adequate, safe, local, diversified, fair, healthy and nutrient rich food for all; and that the task of feeding cities will face multiple constraints posed by inter alia, unbalanced distribution and access, environmental degradation, resource scarcity and climate change, unsustainable production and consumption patterns, and food loss and waste."

The signatory cities to the Pact commit to, among many other things:

- Develop sustainable food systems that are inclusive, resilient, safe and diverse, that provide healthy and affordable food to all people in a human rights-based framework, that minimise waste and conserve biodiversity while adapting to and mitigating impacts of climate change.
- Encourage interdepartmental and cross-sector coordination at municipal and community

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levels, working to integrate urban food policy considerations into social, economic and environment policies, programmes and initiatives, such as, inter alia, food supply and distribution, social protection, nutrition, equity, food production, education, food safety and waste reduction.

Of the 210 signatories to the Pact, only nine are US cities.

Last year, the EAT-Lancet Commission issued a report called *Healthy Diets from Sustainable Food Systems*. In the summary, they note: “A radical transformation of the global food system is urgently needed.” The report sets out key goals, targets, and five strategies, which include:

- Seek international and national commitment to shift toward healthy diets.
- Reorient agricultural priorities from producing high quantities of food to producing healthy food.
- Sustainably intensify food production to increase high-quality output.
- Strong and coordinated governance of land and oceans.
- At least halve food losses and waste, in line with UN Sustainable Development Goals.¹⁸

In 2017 the Barilla Center for Food and Nutrition, in partnership with the Economist Intelligence Unit, published the [Food Sustainability Index](#), a global study on nutrition, sustainable agriculture and food waste. They collected data from 67 countries across the world to “highlight best practices and key areas for improvement in relation to the food paradoxes and the main Sustainable Development Goals” of the United Nations. The overall best, globally, was France; other countries in the top quartile were Japan, Germany, Spain, Sweden, Portugal, Italy, South Korea and Hungary. The rank of the United States was in the bottom half.

There are many organizations in the United States dedicated to improving the food system, and in this it is important to draw a distinction between those working on systems change, by contrast to those working specifically on an aspect of the system, such as agriculture

or public health.

Borrowing a definition from the [Oxford Martin Programme on the Future of Food](#), a food system is “a complex web of activities involving the production, processing, transport, and consumption. Issues concerning the food system include the governance and economics of food production, its sustainability, the degree to which we waste food, how food production affects the natural environment and the impact of food on individual and population health.”¹⁹

As pointed out by the Oxford Martin Programme on the Future of Food, a more holistic framework is needed to address the myriad interconnected issues pointed out above, and “a food systems approach” has become increasingly valued “to identify, analyse and assess the impact and feedback of the systems different actors, activities and outcomes to help identify intervention points for enhancing food security.”²⁰

More recently, an impressive level of coordination has emerged in the United States, with the recognition of the need to more formally align into coalitions or collaborations to amplify and synchronize the work as collective action toward systems change.

Among the more recent systems oriented academically affiliated centers or programs in the United States are: [CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute](#) (a center at the CUNY Graduate School of Public Health and Health Policy); [Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future](#) (within the Bloomberg School of Public Health); the [Center for Regional Food Systems at Michigan State University](#); the [Berkeley Food Institute](#); the [Tufts University Food and Nutrition Innovation Council](#); the [Center for Environmental Farming Systems at North Carolina State University](#); and the [Food Systems project at Colorado State University](#).

In philanthropy, the [Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems Funders](#) is an affinity group of “community and corporate foundations, private foundations, government agencies, health conversion foundations, investment organizations,

¹⁸ *Healthy Diets from Sustainable Food Systems: Food Planet Health*. Summary Report of the EAT-Lancet Commission, EAT, https://eatforum.org/content/uploads/2019/07/EAT-Lancet_Commission_Summary_Report.pdf. Accessed 17 June 2020.

¹⁹ *The Future of Food*. Oxford Martin School, <https://www.oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk/food/>. Accessed 17 June 2020

²⁰ *What is the Food System?*. Oxford Martin Programme on the Future of Food, <https://www.futureoffood.ox.ac.uk/what-food-system>. Accessed 17 June 2020

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individual donors and investors, and more” working together to amplify “the impact of philanthropic and investment communities in support of just and sustainable food and agriculture systems.”

Institutional affinity groups have also taken up food systems work, such as the Urban Sustainability Directors Network and their [Sustainable Consumption Toolkit](#) for food. The nation’s largest School districts have formed the [Urban School Food Alliance](#), which was particularly effective in advocating for rule waivers that would allow school districts to offer emergency meals during the first months of business interruption due to COVID-19 public health orders.²¹ The Urban School Food Alliance is a collaboration started in 2012 among the largest food service divisions of the largest school districts in the country. This “alliance of alliances” now represents 12 districts, serving 3.6 million students, over 635,000,000 school meals per year, for a combined \$800 million in food service. When they turned their attention to antibiotic free chicken, the poultry supply chain was compelled to meet that demand.

In the civil society, or nonprofit, sector—sometimes called NGO or non-profit; referred to here as Civil Society Organizations, or CSO’s—a significant number of collaboratively based organizations are forming or growing, from local food policy councils to national collaborations and coalitions.

THE SCALE OF ENGAGEMENT: LOCAL ACTION, NATIONAL NETWORK

The worldwide growth of food policy councils in the last decade has, in turn, given rise to a dedicated project of the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, which describes food policy councils as “networks that represent multiple stakeholders and that are either sanctioned by a government body or exist independently of government, and address food-related issues and needs within a city, county, state, tribal, multi-county or other designated region.”²² In committing to this project area, The Center for a Livable Future recognizes that “... collaboration

amongst diverse sectors—community, government, nonprofit and private— has emerged as a long-term strategy to create systemic and meaningful improvements in the food system.”²³ Their database of food policy councils shows them at over 300 in North America.²⁴

Among the more notable food policy councils is the Los Angeles Food Policy Council, launched in 2011 as an initiative of Mayor Villaraigosa of Los Angeles. It was launched with a mandate developed by a task force, to advance 55 action steps in six priority areas, directed toward the goal of building a more sustainable and equitable regional food system in the LA region of southern California.²⁵

The well staffed, local government supported council gave rise to the Good Food Purchasing Program (the Program), adopted by the City of Los Angeles and Los Angeles Unified School District in 2012. The Program is now widely considered a powerful tool for leveraging market power to create a fulcrum for food system change; it harnesses the purchasing power of large institutions—particularly governmental institutions—to drive supply chain changes that increase the production and distribution of food that supports local economies, fair labor, environmental sustainability, animal welfare and public health. The Program provides a metric based, flexible framework that is the basis for a feedback and rating tool for the enrolled institutions.

It was designed through an extensive multi-sector, interdisciplinary, multi-stakeholder collaboration and review process within the LA Food Policy Council (LAFPC). Due to the immediate success of the Program at LA Unified School District, interest in adoption by other cities was piqued. In 2015 the Program was spun off from the LAFPC and became the program of the Center for Good Food Purchasing, established to advance the national expansion of the Program. It is now in 20 cities and over 45 municipal institutions across the country. The systemically holistic Good Food Purchasing Program was favorably recognized in 2018²⁶ by the World Future Council, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the

21 Green, Erica L., and Lola Fadulu. “Schools Transform into ‘Relief’ Kitchens, but Federal Aid Fails to Keep Up.” The New York Times, 19 April 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/19/us/politics/coronavirus-school-meals-relief.html>. Accessed 18 June 2020.

22 *About Us*. Food Policy Networks, <http://www.foodpolicynetworks.org/about/>. Accessed 17 June 2020.

23 *Ibid.*

24 Food Policy Council Map. Food Policy Networks, <http://www.foodpolicynetworks.org/councils/fpc-map/>. Accessed 17 June 2020.

25 Good Food For All Agenda. Los Angeles Food Policy Task Force, July 2010, https://goodfoodlosangeles.files.wordpress.com/2010/07/good-food-full_report_single_072010.pdf. Accessed 17 June 2020.

26 Good Food Purchasing Program. FuturePolicy.org, <https://www.futurepolicy.org/healthy-ecosystems/los-angeles-good-food-purchasing-pro->

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United Nations (FAO), and IFOAM Organics International.

Integral to the work of the Center for Good Food Purchasing is its collaborative approach, organizing a network of cross-sector national and local partners²⁷ committed to food system change.

FOOD SYSTEM REDESIGN: COMMUNITY BASED, REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEMS

Among the national partners of the Center for Good Food Purchasing is the HEAL (Health, Environment, Agriculture, Labor) Food Alliance, a “multi-sector, multi-racial” 50 member coalition working toward transformation of food and farming systems. The membership includes “rural and urban farmers, fisherfolk, farm and food chain workers, rural and urban communities, scientists, public health advocates, environmentalists, and indigenous groups.”

The [10 point platform](#) of the HEAL Food Alliance, published in 2018, is thematically inclusive and representative of the range of strategies that have cohered in the last several years around the needed direction for food system reform. Their platform is organized into four categories, with [specific action steps](#) detailed for each of the 10 points below:²⁸

- Economy
 - Dignity for Food Workers
 - Opportunity for All Producers
 - Fair and Competitive Markets
 - Resilient Regional Economies
- Health
 - Dump the Junk: Curb Junk Food Marketing
 - Increase Food Literacy and Transparency: Increase knowledge of, connection to, and transparency around food sources
 - Real Food in Every Hood: Making affordable, fair, sustainable, and culturally appropriate food the norm in every neighborhood

- Environment
 - Phase Out Factory Farming
 - Promote Sustainable Farming, Fish and Ranching
 - Close the Loop on Waste, Runoff, and Energy

Similarly, the six categories for action²⁹ in the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact are: (1) governance, (2) sustainable diets and nutrition, (3) social and economic equity, (4) food production, (5) food supply and distribution, and (6) food waste.

FROM THE GRASS ROOTS TO THE SO CALLED GRASS TOPS, THE GOALS HAVE BEEN CONSISTENT AND EVIDENT

Incremental progress has been made in recent years toward the ideas which these pacts and platforms embrace, with many finding common ground in changing governmental purchasing practices. In his Briefing Note 8 (May 2014) *The Power of Procurement: Public Purchasing in Realizing the Right to Food*,³⁰ UN Special Rapporteur De Schutter recognized that “Governments have few sources of leverage over increasingly globalized food systems—but public procurement is one of them. When sourcing food for schools, hospitals and public administrations, governments have a rare opportunity to support more nutritious diets and more sustainable food systems in one fell swoop.”

Procurement is also one of the recommended actions of category five of the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, which calls for a review of “public procurement and trade policy aimed at facilitating food supply from short chains linking cities to secure a supply of healthy food, while also facilitating job access, fair production conditions and sustainable production for the most vulnerable producers and consumers, thereby using the potential of public procurement to help realize the right to food for all.”³¹

As pointed out by the Union of Concerned Scientists in their 2017 report on the impacts of the Good Food Purchasing Program in Los Angeles, the “benefits of

[gram/](#). Accessed 17 June 2020.

27 National Partners. Center for Good Food Purchasing, <https://goodfoodpurchasing.org/about-the-center/#national-partners>. Accessed 17 June 2020.

28 HEAL Platform for Real Food. HEAL Food Alliance, <https://healfoodalliance.org/platformforrealfood/>. Accessed 17 June 2020.

29 Milan Urban Food Policy Pact. Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, 15 October 2015, <http://www.milanurbanfoodpolicypact.org/text/>. Accessed 17 June 2020.

30 De Schutter, Olivier. “The Power of Procurement: Public Purchasing in the Service of Realizing the Right to Food.” Briefing Note 08. United Nations, April 2014.

31 “Food supply and distribution.” MUFPP Recommended actions. Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, http://www.milanurbanfoodpolicypact.org/mufpp_food-supply-and-distribution/. Accessed 17 June 2020.

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a better supply chain are amplified across institutions and regions.³² The incremental shifts created by the institutions enrolled in the Program show combined totals across institutions of over \$56 million in supporting local economies, over \$32 million in supporting fair labor, over \$20 million toward meat raised without routine use of antibiotics, and an additional \$10 million supporting environmental sustainability.

A key complementary strategy is the mission driven food distributor, such as [The Common Market](#)³³ a non-profit CSO which is an aggregator and distributor of regional farm products. The mission of the nonprofit is to “connect communities with good food from sustainable family farms. We strive to improve food security, farm viability, and community and ecological health,” in support of a vision of “a nation composed of vibrant regional food systems—where interdependent urban and rural communities thrive through relationships that build the health and wealth of all people.”

Common Market and similar nonprofit, mission driven aggregation and distribution businesses are often informally called food hubs. They were characterized and identified in a comprehensive 2017 report by the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis as “being at the heart of the values-based supply chains,...that link agriculture producers with markets, while still maintaining core values and missions of equitable incomes for farmers and food systems workers, ecological and environmental sustainability, and access to healthy food.”³⁴

These mission driven food hubs have been an engine of food systems change, particularly effective when linked with a procurement strategy such as the Good Food Purchasing Program. And they proved particularly valuable toward addressing the urgent community needs

which suddenly arose during the COVID-19 crisis.

WHAT COVID-19 HAS REVEALED

With the \$900 billion food service sector³⁵ shut down, and our on-demand food culture ground to a halt, the COVID-19 pandemic experience starkly revealed, in almost daily headlines, the issues which the food system reform organizations had been working to address for so long.

It highlighted that farmers and small businesses have precarious livelihoods that are threatened by even a short-term loss of revenue. The shutdown of the food service pipelines they had built their business models on left many farmers and food processors dangling, with an estimated \$1.32 billion loss of food,³⁶ imperiling their livelihoods.³⁷

And yet, while the farmers and food processors were desperate to find markets for their supply, food banks were stretched beyond capacity, with not enough food to meet the dramatically sudden increase in demand.³⁸

Although school districts nimbly met the challenge by diverting their cafeteria food programs to emergency meal delivery at pick up locations, they did so at great sacrifice to their budgets. The Urban School Food Alliance estimates that many school districts lost millions of dollars per day in this heroic effort.³⁹

The most vulnerable in our food system were rendered even more so. Our [food system workers, who are around one sixth of the nation's workforce](#), are essential, but the lack of safe working conditions and low pay leaves them vulnerable to contracting COVID-19 and their illness rate

32 Reinhardt, Sarah, and Kranti Mulik. Purchasing Power: How Institutional “Good Food” Procurement Policies Can Shape a Food System That’s Better for People and Planet. Union of Concerned Scientists, June 2018.

33 Mission. The Common Market, <https://www.thecommonmarket.org/about/mission>. Accessed 17 June 2020.

34 Harvesting Opportunity: The Power of Regional Food Systems Investments to Transform Community (Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, et al., 2017), at page 178. Accessed at <https://www.stlouisfed.org/community-development/publications/harvesting-opportunity>, retrieved June 15, 2020

35 <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-markets-prices/food-service-industry/market-segments/>

36 Tropp, Debra, et al. Harvesting Opportunity: The Power of Regional Food Systems Investments to Transform Community. Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis and Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, 2017, pp. 178, <https://www.stlouisfed.org/community-development/publications/harvesting-opportunity>. Accessed 17 June 2020.

37 Thilmany, Dawn, et al. “COVID-19 Economic Impact on Local Food Markets.” National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, 23 March 2020, <https://sustainableagriculture.net/blog/covid-economic-impact-local-food/>. Accessed 17 June 2020.

38 Rector, Kevin. “Rotting food. Hungry masses. Chaotic supply chains. Coronavirus upends the U.S. food system.” Los Angeles Times, 6 May 2020.

39 Urban School Food Alliance. Personal communication, 21 April 2020

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is rising.⁴⁰

It was, unfortunately, not a surprise that the social determinants of health were a factor in COVID-19 illness and death, with higher rates of infection and mortality among those living in poverty, experiencing homelessness, and among ethnic minorities.⁴¹ It is well known in public health that American racial minorities—particularly African American and Native Americans and Hawai’ians—suffer greater chronic diseases such as diabetes, obesity and hypertension, and it is now shown that these comorbidities lead to worse health outcomes in the case of COVID-19.⁴² These underlying health conditions have long been attributed to the poor quality of nutrition in oppressed communities.⁴³ The inequitable availability of healthy food is apparent in low income communities which have limited access to affordable, nutritious food and instead are reliant on cheap, over processed food which is high in calories but low in nutrient density.⁴⁴

The challenge to the nation’s meat supply due to processing plant shutdowns was also problematic. The centralized efficiencies and economies of scale proved big enough to fail,⁴⁵ as shown by the health threat to workers⁴⁶ and the disruption to commodity meat supply due to virus outbreaks in the small number of packing plants in the hands of only a few highly consolidated

and vertically integrated meat companies. Ninety-Eight percent of US meat is processed in 50 plants; six multinational companies⁴⁷ now control the world’s meat supply. The supply chain is efficient, but it is not resilient. Further, the pursuit of production at the risk of the health of processing plant workers, was reported to benefit the profit driven export model of the large American meat businesses, not American consumers.⁴⁸

THE SYSTEM THAT PUT PROFITS OVER PEOPLE SIMPLY DID NOT WORK

What did work? The more regionalized, localized aspects of the food system, particularly as supported by coordinated, community based networks.

The less centralized and more localized management of meat from ranch to retail was more nimble in a crisis; it is also found in the ranching systems that prioritize humane practices and ecological well-being, such as [Blue Nest Beef](#), [First Hand Foods](#), [Belcampo](#), and [Mary’s Chicken](#), to name just a few. Most of these ranchers built their businesses by selling to high end restaurants; during this first phase of our COVID-19 experience, they were able to sell direct to consumers or deliver to food banks,⁴⁹ and meet the needs of the times. Not so with the consolidated meat conglomerates, who were locked into the rigid systems of scale they have created.

40 Held, Lisa. “OSHA Faulted for Not Doing More to Protect Workers from COVID-19.” Civil Eats, 16 June 2020, https://civileats.com/2020/06/16/osha-faulted-for-not-doing-more-to-protect-workers-from-covid-19/?utm_source=Verified%20CE%20list&utm_campaign=8c73dfe1d5-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_7_3_2018_8_13_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_aae5e4a315-8c73dfe1d5-294305685. Accessed 17 June 2020.; Food Chain Workers Alliance. The Hands That Feed Us.

41 Abrams, Elissa M. and Stanley J. Szefler. COVID-19 and the impact of social determinants of health. The Lancet, 18 May 2020, [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanres/article/PIIS2213-2600\(20\)30234-4/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanres/article/PIIS2213-2600(20)30234-4/fulltext). Accessed 17 June 2020.

42 Kirby, Tony. “Evidence mounts on the disproportionate effect of COVID-19 on ethnic minorities.” The Lancet, vol 8. The Lancet News, June 2020, [https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lanres/PIIS2213-2600\(20\)30228-9.pdf](https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lanres/PIIS2213-2600(20)30228-9.pdf). Accessed 17 June 2020; Petrilli, Christopher M., et al. Factors associated with hospitalization and critical illness among 4,103 patients with COVID-19 disease in New York City. medRxiv, 11 April 2020, <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.04.08.20057794v1>. Accessed 17 June 2020.

43 Popkin, Barry M.. Global nutrition dynamics: the world is shifting rapidly toward a diet linked with noncommunicable diseases. The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, vol. 84, issue 2, August 2006, pp. 289-298, <https://academic.oup.com/ajcn/article/84/2/289/4881816#sec-1>. Accessed 17 June 2020.; Mau, Marjorie K., et al. Cardiometabolic Health Disparities in Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders. Epidemiologic Reviews, 16 June 2009, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2893232/>. Accessed 17 June 2020.

44 Ver Ploeg, Michele. Access to Affordable, Nutritious Food Is Limited in “Food Deserts.” United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, 1 March 2010, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2010/march/access-to-affordable-nutritious-food-is-limited-in-food-deserts/>. Accessed 17 June 2020.

45 Grandin, Temple. “Temple Grandin: Big Meat Supply Chains Are Fragile.” Forbes, 3 May 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/templegrandin/2020/05/03/temple-grandin-big-meat-supply-chains-are-fragile/#719dfc06650c>. Accessed 17 June 2020.

46 Lakhani, Nina. “US coronavirus hotspots linked to meat processing plants.” The Guardian, 15 May 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/15/us-coronavirus-meat-packing-plants-food>. Accessed 17 June 2020.

47 Corkery, Michael, and David Yaffe-Bellany. “The Food Chain’s Weakest Link: Slaughterhouses.” The New York Times, 18 April 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/18/business/coronavirus-meat-slaughterhouses.html>. Accessed 17 June 2020.

48 Polansek, Tom. “As U.S. meat workers fall sick and supplies dwindle, exports to China soar.” Reuters, 10 May 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-usa-meatpacking-an/as-u-s-meat-workers-fall-sick-and-supplies-dwindle-exports-to-china-soar-idUSKBN22NoIN>. Accessed 17 June 2020.

49 Curtis, Jennifer. “Firsthand Foods Community Fund.” Firsthand Foods, 26 March 2020, <https://firsthandfoods.com/2020/03/26/first-hand-foods-community-fund/>. Accessed 19 June 2020.

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Those areas that had such mission aligned food hubs were able to pivot quickly toward redirecting their supply chains to areas of need, such as the example of The Common Market providing intermediary support for local farmers and emergency food relief in New York, Georgia, and Texas. Due to the relationships it developed in building its community-centered model, it was quickly able to pivot and connect the dots of supply and demand, operating within its existing networks.⁵⁰

Local governments also learned to connect these dots from their command centers of the frontline responses to the public health crisis and its economic fallout.⁵¹ They learned to match unused restaurant capacity with the growing community need for meal support, as with the model of the [World Central Kitchen](#), and provide other services to match supply and demand.

The nation realized how much food is a public good, and that governments have an important role in its equitable distribution.

This experience underscores the view that food system change works most effectively and comprehensively where there are a few key elements in place:

- A collaborative, multi-sector coalition (like a food policy council) focused on a localized food system with shared values of community, equity, economic and environmental health.
- Quantifiable goals to direct the purchasing power of large anchor institutions (such as schools and hospitals) toward increasing economic viability along a values based supply chain .
- Supply chain infrastructure that includes mission driven centers of aggregation and distribution (food hubs), dedicated to the same vision and goals of the collaborative.
- Deeply invested, community informed local government leadership to connect the necessary dots within and across the many city and county agencies that intersect with food—which should include the workforce and economic development teams, in recognition that the food system is an

economic one that responds to financial incentives and investments.

A more regionally oriented food system should be high on any resilience agenda. A system that serves community health, workers, and local businesses along those supply chains, can be a more resilient system in times of crisis. Indeed, this recommendation is being made for all systems in addition to the one for food.⁵²

CHANGING COURSE

Healthy food, and the ability to make a fair living producing, picking, packing, and processing it, are essential to the equitable well-being of everyone who participates in the food system. The food system is an essential service, and managing it in a way that is sustainable for the planet and people is a social, economic, and environmental imperative. This increasingly urgent call to action is heightened by imminent threats of climate change to our food production systems. Here are some principles and steps to which commitment should be renewed, and action accelerated.

CITIES CAN LEAD THE WAY

As the COVID-19 crisis has illustrated, cities have a better understanding of their residents' needs, and the programs and processes that can work best for their population. In our modern, global context with the fluidity and immediacy of exchange in communication and culture, cities have the ability to network in a way not previously available.

Cities are the scale of government at which a more regionally responsive food system should be created. With financial and policy support from their national and state governments, cities can lead the way toward a regionally resilient food system that supports local and neighboring rural economies, when actively engaged in and informed by community, and the CSO sector.

- More cities in the US should commit to the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact and participate in the C40, a network of world cities that meet regularly to

⁵⁰ The Common Market in the News. The Common Market, <https://www.thecommonmarket.org/about/press>. Accessed 17 June 2020.

⁵¹ CBSNewYork. "Coronavirus Update: De Blasio Pledges 'We Will Not Allow Any New Yorker To Go Hungry' As City Launches \$170 Million Initiative To Fight Food Insecurity." CBSNewYork, 15 April 2020, <https://newyork.cbslocal.com/2020/04/15/coronavirus-update-de-blasio-pledges-we-will-not-allow-any-new-yorker-to-go-hungry-as-more-face-food-insecurity/>. Accessed 17 June 2020.

⁵² Slaughter, Anne-Marie. America, Not Trump, Will Save America. New York Times, 22 March 2020.; Newitz, Annalee. "Why Cities Fail." The New York Times, 17 May 2020.

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address climate change. At their October 2019 meeting, C40 leaders issued a Good Food Cities Declaration,⁵³ now signed by 13 major cities, which pledges to align food procurement to planetary and dietary health, and reduce food waste.

- Affinity groups of cities are already available to share best practices and learn from each other in the United States, such as the US Conference of Mayors, and Living Cities.
- Municipal leaders can tap into those networks to help fulfill their goals through implementation steps and best practices such as the ones set forth below.

USE PUBLIC CONTRACTS TO EXPRESS PUBLIC VALUES AND SET REGIONAL TARGETS

The procurement process of large institutions allows them to obtain reasonable percentages of value-based food within their budgets, as conveyed to the food service or supply bidders through Requests for Proposals. The financial security of the long-term, high-volume contracts of schools and other large institutions is a lower risk opportunity for the supply chain.

If cities as centers of regional food change were to coordinate their public food procurement contracts with value based goals, the combined purchasing power could be the basis for a more equitable, community centered, mid-scale food supply chain, operating alongside the more globalized supply chain, much like the way renewable energy operates alongside the prevailing energy fuel system.

A mid-tier or community level system—one organized as a regional supply chain calibrated with value based purchasing policies with large scale commitments from public institutions—could support entrepreneurial responsiveness to the varied needs of a community.⁵⁴

- Cities and counties should adopt purchasing targets for all their large food service institutions that direct a meaningful percent of purchases to

the public values of local economic support, fair wages and working conditions, and people and planetary health.

- Goals supporting local economies, sustainable production practices, fair labor practices, and nutritional health should be targeted and implemented with equivalent priority.
- Equity goals should be front and center, as shown in the Good Food policy resolutions of Cook County, Illinois,⁵⁵ and should incorporate access to land and capital for historically dispossessed communities.⁵⁶
- City and county leaders should aggregate the institutional targets into regional targets.
- They should extend their reach beyond municipal and school food to include hospitals, military bases, jails and other publicly funded food programs available in each city; the aggregate dollars available to nurture a good food system would be more than enough to make a difference in the regional food economy and in the well-being of their region.
- They should implement these targets by holding their public institutions accountable in bi-annual publicly presented progress reports.
- Those targets should be backed up with contractual commitments to producers and distributors.
- Nationally networked city procurement goals could be leveraged to influence the federal role in funding aspects of the food system.
- Develop and direct financial incentives to the anchor institutions to enable purchasing support for fair wage and climate friendly food production practices such as soil health and incentives should include an increase in school meal reimbursements for the procurement of local, sustainable, fair, and humanely produced foods to provide all students access to nutritious, high-quality, local food,

⁵³ The Good Food Cities Declaration. C40 Cities, <https://www.c40.org/other/good-food-cities>. Accessed 17 June 2020.

⁵⁴ Lyson, Thomas A., et al. *Food and the Mid-level Farm: Renewing an Agriculture of the Middle*. MIT Press, 23 May 2008.

⁵⁵ Cook County Board of Commissions. To Adopt The Good Food Purchasing Policy. 14 May 2018, <https://gfpp.app.box.com/v/Resolution-Cook-CountyIllinois>. Accessed 17 June 2020.

⁵⁶ *Leveling the Fields: Creating Farming Opportunities for Black People, Indigenous People, and Other People of Color*. Union of Concerned Scientists and Heal Food Alliance, 2020.

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building on the pioneering [local food incentive models established in Michigan](#),⁵⁷ [Oregon](#),⁵⁸ and [New York](#).⁵⁹

ADOPT, COORDINATE AND FUND AN INTEGRATED SUITE OF POLICIES AND PROGRAMS THAT SUPPORT THE REGIONAL TARGETS

US consumers spend an estimated \$1 trillion a year on food, which is nearly 10 percent of the gross domestic product.⁶⁰ Upwards of 20 million people are employed in the food industry, inclusive of production, distribution, processing, retail service and waste management.⁶¹ Nationally, the single largest percentage of manufacturing jobs has been in the food sector.⁶² And, for every four workers employed directly by the food system, another job is created indirectly due to economic activity of food system industries.⁶³ In other words, it is a powerful economic engine.

Small businesses are the connective tissue in our economy, and also the people taking the risks to make new models work. Per the Small Business Administration, there are around 28 million of them—defined as 500 employees or less—in the United States.⁶⁴ Most of the new jobs in the country are created from small businesses. The survival rate, however, is generally less than 10 years.⁶⁵ Providing a supportive structure for our small business risk takers in a re-designed food system is paramount to our future success on many levels.

Most major cities across America have robust programs to help small neighborhood markets source and sell healthy produce. They could provide more consistent long term support for those enterprises.

Urban and peri-urban agriculture and aquaculture are examples of distributed, localized food production

systems with job creation potential, that currently struggle through multiple barriers to entry with very little to no public funding support.

Each region can design its own blend of programs and policies, in the way each region set goals for renewable energy that have unique blends of solar, wind, geothermal, or biomass. We have learned enough in the 21st Century to know that in addition to offering “all of the above” approaches to our multiple-choice problems, there is no one size fits all.

- The economic development, workforce investment, sustainability offices, public health and urban planning departments should be fully committed and coordinated toward implementing the values based regional targets.
- The municipal entities should work in partnership with rural communities, civil society organizations (including nonprofit and philanthropic) in developing action steps and achieving the regional targets.
- Coordination and cooperation should also be sought with the state level departments of food and agriculture, business development, education and health.
- Dedicate a permanent stream of government funding for value-chain innovation among regional suppliers to create those shorter supply chains, such as the mission driven distribution infrastructure in food hubs dedicated to intermediary work between local small to mid-sized farmers and food businesses, and public institutions, neighborhood markets and community serving organizations—this mission driven distribution infrastructure is worthy of public

57 10 Cents a Meal for Michigan's Kids & Farms, <https://www.tencentsmichigan.org/>. Accessed 19 June 2020.

58 Kane, Deborah, et. al. The Impact of Seven Cents. Ecotrust, June 2011, https://ecotrust.org/media/7-Cents-Report_FINAL_110630.pdf. Accessed 19 June 2020.

59 Farm-to-School. New York State, <https://agriculture.ny.gov/farming/farm-school>. Accessed 19 June 2020.

60 Ag and Food Sectors and the Economy. United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/ag-and-food-statistics-charting-the-essentials/ag-and-food-sectors-and-the-economy/>. Accessed 19 June 2020.

61 Food Chain Workers Alliance, and Solidarity Research Cooperative. No Piece of the Pie: U.S. Food Workers in 2016. Food Chain Workers Alliance, November 2016, http://foodchainworkers.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/FCWA_NoPieceOfThePie_P.pdf. Accessed 19 June 2020.

62 Torpey, Elka. “Got skills? Think manufacturing.” U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, June 2014, <https://www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/2014/article/manufacturing.htm>. Accessed 19 June 2020.

63 Local Food Impact Calculator. USDA Agricultural Marketing Service and Colorado State University, <https://calculator.localfoodeconomics.com>. Accessed 17 June 2020.

64 Frequently Asked Questions. SBA Office of Advocacy, September 2012, https://www.sba.gov/sites/default/files/FAQ_Sept_2012.pdf. Accessed 19 June 2020.

65 Do economic or industry factors affect business survival?. SBA Officer of Advocacy, June 2012, <https://www.sba.gov/sites/default/files/Business-Survival.pdf>. Accessed 17 June 2020.

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investment for the public good that is realized through more equitable distribution of food.

- Capital projects such as the warehousing and logistics involved in distribution, as well as school kitchens and incubator style commercial kitchens, could be supported through public finance mechanisms such as local bond measures.⁶⁶
- There should also be investment in localized and decentralized meat, grain, and produce processing facilities that support local ranchers, growers, fisherman and fish farmers to enable their operations to get to mid-scale.
- Invest in the people power to coordinate and integrate the complex ecosystem of cross-sector partnerships between the public, private, and civic sectors critical for building, maintaining, and activating strong local and regional food systems, especially during times of crisis. Each region could also explore the cultivation of an additional funding stream to support those coordinated goals.

RECOGNIZE, ACCOUNT FOR, AND BALANCE, THE TRUE COSTS OF FOOD

The singular focus of the business model that made cheap food possible overlooks the cost to society of suffering with or cleaning up pollution, the cost of aiding large segments of the population that are not paid enough to buy the food they handle, and the public health costs from the cardio-metabolic disorders that are a direct consequence of industrially created highly processed cheap food. The challenge is the uninformed choices we are making that perpetuate the problem. For example, the presence of sugar in sodas marketed aggressively to children is causally linked by public health officials to the alarming increase in obesity and diabetes among the youth of the world. Yet the purveyors of the sodas do not bear the medical costs of addressing the health problems their products have created. Most often, the public does, through the subsidized health care system. The medical costs are external to the price of the soda paid by the teenager and received by the soda company, yet they are a significant consequence of the transaction.

⁶⁶ Food Systems Finance Resource Center. Council of Development Finance Agencies, <https://www.cdfa.net/cdfa/cdfaweb.nsf/resourcecenters/foodsystems.html>. Accessed 17 June 2020.

⁶⁷ Muller, Alexander, and Pavan Sukdhev. Measuring What Matters in Agriculture and Food Systems. The Economics of Ecosystems & Biodiversity, UN Environment, 2018, http://teebweb.org/agrifood/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Layout_synthesis_sept.pdf. Accessed 17 June 2020.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ What is True Cost Accounting?. Nature & More, EOSTA, <https://www.natureandmore.com/en/true-cost-of-food/what-is-true-cost-accounting>. Accessed 17 June 2020.

Illuminating the cost to society of these negative externalities through a true cost accounting framework might be a way to rework this unintentionally reinforcing system, of re-ordering policy priorities and bringing the system back into balance. This work is supported as a strategic initiative by the [Global Alliance for the Future of Food](#) an international alliance of philanthropic foundations which has as a strategic focus the recognition of the true cost to society of the negative externalities of food. Their initiative is called [True Cost Accounting in Food](#).

Several studies are underway to “account” for the externalities. In 2018, UN Environment launched a study called The Economics of Ecosystem & Biodiversity in Agriculture and Food (TEEBAgriFood). The study is grounded in a systems perspective, the “visible and invisible impacts and dependencies,” and produced a framework which the study authors suggest should be used in business analysis, policy evaluation, and national accounting.⁶⁷ The framework integrates cost benefit analyses, life cycle assessments, and multi-criteria analyses to characterize four “capital flows” from a food product or practice, assessed against impacts to natural capital, produced capital, human capital, and social capital.⁶⁸

This framework is one of the more well known of a number of similar efforts, including [Nature & More](#), an initiative of [Eosta](#), a Netherlands based organic food distributor which is putting true cost accounting principles into practice. They have implemented true cost practices in their bookkeeping, which means that they calculate the impacts on natural and social capital in monetary terms, in addition to financial flows.⁶⁹ In this, they create transparency in an otherwise opaque bottom line.

The result is that a higher priced organic product, such as a strawberry, could be valued as incorporating into its cost the true price of farming the strawberry without offloading the cost to society of the pesticides that would harm the environment and the field worker. The affordability of the organic strawberry could then be

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addressed by government policy, such as the highly successful Market Match⁷⁰ programs (known in some states as Veggie Voucher or Double Up Bucks) which match nutrition assistance benefits dollar for dollar when used to buy fruits or vegetables at a farmer's market.

- Information from true cost accounting studies should be incorporated into decision making and the framework applied in business accounting and policy making.

CONCLUSION

These actionable implementation steps would restore a balance of community relationship to food, and to each other, that is a reminder of our very nature as humans on a fragile planet.

If this food “system” conversation started with Francis Moore Lappe and others of the 1970's, we should look to the changes ahead with her words in mind:

“Can the 21st century be the era in which human beings finally come home, meeting our deep need for security and meaning not in ignoring or conquering, but in living within the community of nature? Now that the stakes are indisputably ultimate, we can break through the limits of the inherited mechanistic worldview and discover the real meaning of the era of ecology—that our very being is dependent upon healthy relationships. We can find in the focus on relationships—the key insight of ecology—the beginning of what we need to meet the multiple crises affecting us, from homelessness to the environmental crisis itself.”

Those words are from her preface to the 1991 reprint of *Diet for a Small Planet* (Ballantine Books, 1971). Now that we are well on our way to a new era in our food system, let's hope the answer to her question is “yes, we can.”

ADDENDUM

Immediate Action Steps to Address the food security and local farm economy impacts of the COVID-19 crisis.

⁷⁰ Impact Report: Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) Grant and California's Market Match. The Ecology Center, 2018, https://market-match.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Market-Match-Impact-Report-2018_web.pdf. Accessed 17 June 2020.

⁷¹ Winne, Mark, and Andy Fisher. “Op-ed: With Food Insecurity on the Rise, Nutrition Incentives Should Be More Equitable.” Civil Eats, 14 May 2020, <https://civileats.com/2020/05/14/op-ed-with-food-insecurity-on-the-rise-nutrition-incentives-should-be-more-equitable/>. Accessed 17 June 2020.

National Farm to School Network advocacy priorities

The [National Farm to School Network](#) was launched in 2007 as a coalition of 30 organizations working toward a “local, equitable food system that promotes the health of the population, the economy & the environment.” It now has 20,000 network members in all 50 states, which they support with capacity building, and policy development and advocacy at all levels of government. With their support, over 450 bills and resolutions were introduced throughout the US in the last decade; a notable achievement was the successful passage of comprehensive farm to school legislation in 25 states, resulting in “funded grant programs, funded coordinator positions, or funded local procurement incentives.”

The following recommendations from their May 2020 policy brief were condensed for inclusion in this document.

Waive the non-federal match requirement for local food and agriculture programs, including Farm to School grants, for the next two years

- Why NFSN is working on this: Local and state governments and nonprofits will be hard-pressed to come up with non-federal matching funds now and as they recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Communities where charitable and state resources have been the hardest hit will now have an additional barrier to accessing federal Farm to School grants. The same will be true for many grant programs that serve beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers and producers and regional food systems. Matching requirements disadvantage areas with less local philanthropy on which to rely,⁷¹ especially in Southern states.
- The HEROES Act waives the non-federal match requirement for Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) and emergency COVID-related Local Agriculture Marketing Program (LAMP) funding, but not for the regular LAMP grants or other matching grants. A cost-share waiver should be extended to the normal grant cycles for the next two years for Farm to School grants, Value-Added Producer Grants, Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion

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Program, and the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program.

- NFSN is advocating in the Senate for the Farm to School match waiver, and ideally other match waivers, to be included in any future COVID-19 relief legislation. The requirement for a non-federal cost-share is written in statute and must be waived by Congress.

Cover operational and emergency costs of Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) sites

- Why NFSN is working on this: Many daycare and early childhood education (ECE) sites are financially struggling due to closures and the emergency expenses associated with the pandemic. The food children receive in ECE is a critical source of nutrition and shapes their future palates. Faced with mounting costs, ECE sites may choose not to participate in CACFP, may curtail or end their farm to ECE activities, or may close entirely.
- A measure included in the HEROES Act provides CACFP sites with the administrative portion of what they would have received in their normal reimbursement (using 2019 numbers).

Create a set-aside small business relief fund for producers of color

- Why NFSN is working on this: Communities of Color have been especially hard-hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. Producers of color, historically denied access to USDA resources, are the least likely to benefit from the agriculture assistance payments that have been passed so far. The largest farmers, and those with existing relationships with Farm Service Agency (FSA) offices, will have a much easier time accessing these new programs quickly. The bills passed in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic have not included specific set-asides for producers of color (or “socially disadvantaged,” in USDA terms). There is language to direct funds to minority lenders (banks with a majority of “minority” owners), but that does not help individual producers.
- NFSN asked for a \$300 million set-aside for producers of color in its federal policy platform.⁷²

Authorize USDA to issue farm credit debt relief for small producers

- Why NFSN is working on this: The Intertribal Agriculture Council has advocated for immediate measures from USDA to reduce farmer debt, by combining loan deferral and extension of the repayment period for FSA loans (Farm Ownership loans in particular).
- This approach would provide immediate financial relief without requiring a new program to be created. To avoid use of this relief by larger corporate producers, it would require payment limits and/or limits placed on the Adjusted Gross Income.

Expand online Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) authorization

- Why NFSN is working on this: Many farm to school producers are turning to direct market opportunities as their institutional outlets have closed or reduced volume. At the same time, the expansion of Pandemic EBT for school meal- and CACFP-eligible families has shifted more purchasing power into consumers’ hands directly. Unfortunately, only a handful of the largest retailers are currently able to serve online SNAP purchasers. This reduces choice and access for the consumers while disadvantaging the local producers who are not able to accept online SNAP. It was an issue with the pilot program, but with the pandemic, making online purchase and pickup/delivery accessible has become exponentially more important.

An Assessment of Impacts to Local Farming Due to the Public Orders Halting Food Service During COVID19 Management; Recommendations

The following [economic impact assessment and recommendations was compiled in March, 2020 for the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition](#) by Dawn Thilmany, Becca Jablonski, Debra Tropp, Blake Angelo, and Sarah Low. More information about the authors can be found at the end of the document. It has been edited for presentation in this section. Please see the original report for its data sources and author information.

Among the businesses facing losses as a result of

⁷² National Farm to School Network Federal Policy Response to COVID-19. National Farm to School Network, 6 May 2020, <http://www.farmto-school.org/documents/NFSN-COVID-PolicyPlatform.pdf>. Accessed 17 June 2020.

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COVID-19 are the farms and ranches that sell through local and regional food markets. Social distancing measures such as the closure of universities, schools, restaurants, and local food markets (e.g., farmers markets, farm stands) will result in significant shifts in where food is sold or acquired, and subsequently, markets for farms and ranches. The Congressional Research Service estimated local food sales at \$11.8B in 2017, with nearly 8 percent of U.S. farms and ranches (159,000 operations) participating. The vast majority (85 percent) of participating farms and ranches are small. Further, about one in four beginning farmers and ranchers use local food markets to differentiate their product (and get prices above commodity pricing). Census data from 2007 and 2012 show that beginning farmers that had local food sales had higher average survival rates across all sales classes, and that local food markets can support profitable operations, even at the lowest sales categories.

Across key local and regional markets (i.e., farmers markets, farm to school, food hubs serving other institutions, and restaurants) we estimate a \$688.7 million decline in sales leading to a payroll decline of up to \$103.3 million, and a total loss to the economy of up to \$1.32 billion from March to May 2020. Without immediate mitigation, we may lose many small, socially disadvantaged, and beginning farms and the important markets they serve.

Projected impacts by selected market, based on March-May period of social distancing:

Farmers Markets

- With COVID-19 induced market losses of 10-25 percent, there is an estimated \$240 million to \$600 million decline in sales, leading to a \$36 million to \$90 million decline in payroll paid by farms marketing to local markets.
- The multiplier effect of a loss of \$240-600 million in sales would lead to an estimated loss to the community economy of: \$460 million- \$1.15 billion.

Policy Recommendations

- Explicitly Include Local Food and Farm Businesses in Small Business Support Programs: Declare local farm and food assets as key community assets. Require emergency food assistance dollars flowing to communities to support local farm and food businesses. Explicitly integrate local farm and food business into all small business, workforce and

emergency payments/loan programs.

- Expand Incentives for Small Food and Farm Businesses to Move Online: Aggressively encourage farmers to integrate online ordering/sales platforms, as increasingly states (e.g., CT) are requiring practices that limit customer interaction.
- Accelerate Waivers and Expand Flexibility for Current USDA Programs: Leverage congressional and executive authority to waive limitations on the reach of feeding programs' ability to purchase food from local and regional suppliers. Relax expenditure limitations so that current USDA award recipients can innovate and rapidly respond to community needs, e.g., Michigan reported that due to lost sales at schools, their Michigan Farm to Freezer program is shifting to freeze items for other markets. Expand and add flexibility to the LAMP and Value-Added Producer Grant Programs so future awards incentivize innovations that enhance rapid responses to future supply disruptions.

Farm to School

- An estimated 10 percent loss in farm to school sales will result from COVID-19. Total farm to school purchases were \$789 million during the 2013-2014 school year. A 10 percent loss of direct and intermediated sales means an estimated \$613 million revenue loss.
- Given estimates of labor share of local farm market revenues, this would equate to \$9.2 million in lost payroll.
- The multiplier effect of a loss of \$61.3M in farm to school sales would lead to an estimated loss to the community economy of: \$120.3 million.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Feeding American and its Hunger Action Center, Map the Meal Gap <http://map.feedingamerica.org>; recent report in impacts https://www.feedingamerica.org/research/coronavirus-hunger-research?s_src=W206REFER&ga=2.59180205.1240024909.1592151695-1725205861.1592151695

Share our Strength <https://www.shareourstrength.org>, parent org of No Kid Hungry, teamed up with the James Beard Foundation to support the Community Meals Fund pending <https://www.nokidhungry.org/who-we-are/pressroom/available-comment-share-our-strength-james-beard-foundation-urge-congress>