



May 1, 2020

The Honorable Toni Atkins
Senate President pro Tem
State Capitol, Room 205
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Anthony Rendon
Assembly Speaker
State Capitol, Room 219
Sacramento, CA 94249

The Honorable Holly J. Mitchell
Chair, Senate Budget Committee
State Capitol, Room 5080
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Philip C. Ting
Chair, Assembly Budget Committee
State Capitol, Room 6026
Sacramento, CA 94249

The Honorable Bob Wieckowski
Chair, Senate Budget Sub. No. 2
State Capitol, Room 4085
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Richard Bloom
Chair, Assembly Budget Sub. No. 3
State Capitol, Room 2003
Sacramento, CA 94249

Re: Budget Letter – SUPPORT Food & Agriculture Security, Resilience and Local Economic Development

Dear Senate Pro Tem Atkins, Speaker Rendon, Budget Chairs Mitchell and Ting, and Budget Subcommittee Chairs Wieckowski and Bloom:

We thank you for your leadership during this critical time, given the very significant threats of the COVID-19 crisis. The pandemic threatens to undermine hard-fought efforts to build vibrant local and regional food economies. Approximately 80% of all California farmers are small farmers, including many immigrant farmers, and they are scrambling to change their operations with crops already in the ground. Like others in the food chain, they are victims of food service contracts lost, restaurant and school closures, farmers markets’ unpredictability, and regional food hubs and distributors struggling.

On behalf of the following organizations that are led by or represent and serve small and mid-scale farmers, we urge you to consider the following as part of any package to support farmers.

Establish a California Farm Crisis Center for small and mid-scale growers

California should establish and support a California Farm Crisis Center focused on small and mid-scale growers. The hub would coordinate the necessary 1-on-1 support to local growers and link local, state and federal agencies & resources. Given the \$16 billion congressional relief package coordinated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, as well as over \$300 million for farmer purchases for food banks, California stands to see significant resources for specialty crop (fruit, vegetable and nut) growers as well as local food systems. As a part of this effort, there needs to be coordinated funding for deeply rooted and trusted technical assistance providers to help historically underserved farmers apply for much-needed resources.

Context

Like other small businesses, smaller farmers often lack access to existing resources, capital and networks and run the risk of missing out on much-needed support. Small farmers have largely been left out of the Small Business Administration's Payroll Protection Program (PPP), and now that farmers are eligible for the Economic Injury and Disaster Loan (EIDL) program, we need to ensure that this experience does not repeat. It is also unclear how such farmers would access USDA funding.

Functions

- Coordinate communication between state agencies and federal partners
- Coordinate state agencies and local technical assistance providers
- Ensure federal funds reach intended farmer targets. Coordinate efforts to ensure small and socially disadvantaged farmers receive their share of PPP and EIDL assistance, particularly working with CDFIs and local ag credit partners, and that they have access to future federal emergency funds
- Provide 1-on-1 assistance to growers in Spanish, English, and Hmong, among other languages
- The Center could be housed at CDFA or with a nonprofit, with smaller hubs located at regional technical assistance providers in a few key agricultural regions in the state.

Launch a statewide procurement strategy & "Buy Local" marketing effort

With markets disrupted, we need to call on all Californians to invest in local food systems and economies. The State of California should prioritize local food procurement in its own purchasing and also encourage large businesses to do the same through a comprehensive statewide marketing campaign that will serve small businesses now and through the recovery process. California government should work with federal officials to leverage USDA Local Agriculture Marketing Program monies and support local marketing efforts up and down the state.

Help the emergency food system & schools utilize local food

Both food banks and schools are having to provide increasing amounts of food during this crisis. In many places they have joined forces to distribute food to families. The state should utilize federal monies from The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), Farm-to-Families Program, and the CARES ACT for both schools and food banks, and also ensure that a significant portion is spent on local food procurement that benefits California's farms and ranches. The California Department

of Food & Agriculture should be encouraged to quickly start up its Farm to School Task Force with the First Partner to seek ways for schools to utilize more local food in the meals they are preparing during the crisis.

Assist local food hubs to participate in the new CARES-funded program at USDA to distribute boxes of food to food banks

USDA has announced a Coronavirus Food Assistance Program to purchase food boxes that can be delivered to food banks and passed through to families: 1) fresh fruit and veggies box, 2) dairy products box, 3) pre-cooked meat box, 4) a combo box. The state should identify local aggregators and assist them with USDA contracting and food safety requirements.

Thank you for your consideration and we urge you to include family farmers and local food systems as part of California's solution to food and agriculture security, resilience and economic development.

Sincerely,

Lauren Augusta
Executive Director
MESA

Jeanne Merrill
Policy Director
CalCAN

Rebecca Burgess
Executive Director
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