

## **COLORADO COVID-19 FOOD AND NUTRITION RESPONSE PRIORITIES: HEALTHY FAMILIES, FARMS, AND COMMUNITIES**

August 3, 2020

The Honorable U.S. Senator Michael Bennet  
The Honorable U.S. Senator Cory Gardner  
The Honorable U.S. Representative Diana DeGette  
The Honorable U.S. Representative Joe Neguse  
The Honorable U.S. Representative Scott Tipton  
The Honorable U.S. Representative Ken Buck  
The Honorable U.S. Representative Doug Lamborn  
The Honorable U.S. Representative Jason Crow  
The Honorable U.S. Representative Ed Perlmutter

Dear Colorado Congressional Leaders:

It is vital that Colorado prioritizes access to food for all Coloradans, especially those being impacted economically by the COVID-19 pandemic. Following are three major priorities vital to our state's economic and public health recovery that will ensure that: families can continue to get the food that they need to build a strong foundation for well-being; and that Colorado's food systems can meet the state's needs.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, over 400,000 Coloradans have filed for unemployment, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) caseloads have risen 20 percent, the state's Medicaid program is predicted to swell by 500,000, and nearly one in three Coloradans are now concerned about their family's ongoing access to food. Our country has safety-net programs in place that are proven to help in recessions, such as the aforementioned SNAP. It is imperative that we utilize these proven nutrition assistance programs that help families with low-incomes, such as SNAP, school meals, WIC, and the Child and Adult Care Food Programs (CACFP).

Colorado must also protect its food systems at a local level to ensure local farms, processors, retailers, and others are able to survive and help respond to the ongoing COVID-19 economic recession. Across key local and regional markets, economists have projected a minimum \$3.9 million decline in sales from March 2020 to May 2020 in Colorado. In addition, there were 355 producer and food hub applicants requesting over \$2.6M in small grants for a recently developed Colorado Farm & Food Systems Response Fund that only had a cap of \$370,000 to distribute.

**Therefore, we urge the members of Colorado's federal delegation to endorse and advocate for the priorities outlined below that will ensure that: our local farmers and ranchers can sustain their markets; that the Colorado farming system can feed communities statewide; and that Colorado residents have the supports necessary to feed themselves and their families.**

In addition, across the following policy priorities the next COVID-19 relief package must ensure: transparency in where federal funds are spent as well as consistent data on which populations are participating in and benefiting from COVID-relief programming; and dedicated support for those who have been most historically and currently under-served by the USDA and COVID-response programming

including women; Black, Indigenous, and People of Color; small businesses; and, direct market operations:

**1. Extend USDA Programming that Ensures Healthy Food Access through Recovery**

- a. Secure, extend, and strengthen USDA waivers for food assistance programs to ensure Coloradans have safe access to food including:
  - i. Extending the school nutrition area eligibility waiver that allows for additional feeding sites across the state
  - ii. Prolonging WIC waivers that exempt physical presence and allow and remote issuance in order to keep families and public health workers safe
  - iii. Maximizing SNAP waivers that temporarily suspend program requirements such as the eligibility interview in order to allow county eligibility technicians to keep up with swelling caseloads
- b. Extend the Pandemic EBT Program (P-EBT) until the end of the upcoming school year (June 30, 2021) so that ongoing school closures do not mean that children that utilize free and reduced lunch have to go hungry

**2. Increase Federal Food Assistance Benefits to Meet Rising Rates of Food Insecurity**

- a. Support an indefinite 15 percent increase to all SNAP benefits effective from now through the end of the COVID-19 crisis:
  - i. An increase in SNAP benefits will ensure that families with low incomes are able to navigate rising food costs: grocery costs have increased by an average of five percent. The current full benefit providing just \$1.29 per meal per person fails to cover the real costs of food, and generally families run out of benefits before the end of the month.
  - ii. A SNAP benefit increase will help jumpstart the economy since every \$1 in SNAP benefits generates roughly \$1.50 in spending that's injected into the economy, according to a 2019 U.S. Department of Agriculture study and in more than \$1.65 in spending, according to the estimates of Moody's Analytics' chief economist, Mark Zandi. This is a win-win for Colorado families and for local economies that support farmers, processors, distributors, and food retailers
- b. Allow for an indefinite extension of the Emergency Allotment (EA) SNAP benefits waiver that allows every household to receive the maximum allowable benefit based on their eligible household size.
  - i. Emergency allotments have been crucial for supporting families experiencing disruptions in work due to COVID-19. In Colorado, this has meant an increase of approximately \$150 per household per month in SNAP benefits, or about 34 additional meals per family per month based on the average meal cost of the USDA thrifty meal plan in May 2020.

**3. Support Robust Regional Food Systems**

- a. Provide immediate relief to essential farm and food system workers who grow, harvest, process, and distribute our food, but are at high risk of infection with limited workplace physical distancing and hygiene, and crowded living and transportation conditions:
  - i. Farm workers represent roughly one out of five identified COVID-19 cases in Colorado. We must provide guaranteed pay, paid-sick leave and health insurance

- benefits to them and their families. Additionally, COVID relief programs must be available to all essential workers, regardless of immigration status
- ii. Support legislation such as S4042 "Frontline At-Risk Manual (FARM) Laborers Protection Act and S3609 "Coronavirus Immigrant Families Protection Act"
- b. Enhance supports for small-scale, local producers and food systems in order to continue to meet community food needs without disruptions:
    - i. Maximize the immediate reach of food assistance programs to increase benefits and access to fresh, healthy foods by directing emergency funding to the GusNIP (SNAP incentive) program so that states can increase their healthy food incentives
    - ii. Expand the reach of SNAP through S4202/HR7535 "Expanding SNAP Options Act of 2020" that would provide technical assistance resources to help expand online SNAP to all authorized retailers nationally including direct market farmers
    - iii. Target direct financial assistance to young farmers and ranchers, and to farmers and ranchers who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) through legislation such as S3840 "Food Supply Protection Act of 2020" and S3918 "Paycheck Protection for Producers Act"
  - c. Direct resources to build resilient and efficient food systems infrastructure so they can continue to operate safely and effectively:
    - i. Invest in cold-chain infrastructure across the food system and with intermediaries such as food hubs so that perishable foods intended for donation or sale to a community food assistance site may be distributed safely to urban, suburban, and rural places
    - ii. Support infrastructure and supply grants to food banks, food pantries, and nonprofits to increase their capacity to meet growing demand through purchases of local food, such as the aforementioned S3840 "Food Supply Protection Act"

The undersigned 66 organizations focused on advocacy, education, emergency response, farming, legal services, nutrition, public health, are committed to ending hunger in Colorado and therefore endorse the preceding policy priorities in the forthcoming federal COVID relief package. These provisions will help the drastically increasing number of hungry Colorado families with nutrition supports that are safe, while also providing vital financial and health care assistance to our essential farm and food workers. These measures are a solid investment that will help the economy in Colorado and the rest of the country by providing consumers and farmers with the financial resources necessary to mitigate the severity of an impending economic recession. The undersigned encourage the members of the Colorado federal delegation to please keep these priorities front of mind as they work diligently to craft policies that will help our country and its people during this time of unprecedented need.

Aijalon Farms and Healing Center  
 Apple American Group  
 Boulder County Public Health  
 Chef Ann Foundation  
 The Colorado Blueprint to End Hunger  
 Colorado Center on Law and Policy  
 Colorado Children's Campaign  
 Colorado Springs Food Rescue

Community Food Share  
 Cooking Matters Colorado  
 Crestone Baca Resiliency  
 Cripple Creek Victor School District No. RE-1  
 Denver Food Rescue  
 Denver Public Schools  
 Denver Urban Gardens  
 Dolores School District No. RE-4

Ela Family Farms  
Ekar Farm  
Emerald Gardens / East Denver Food Hub  
Empowering Communities Globally: For the  
Care of Children  
Feeding Colorado  
Food Bank of the Rockies  
Frontline Farming  
Garfield County Public Health  
Garfield School District No. RE-2  
GoFarm  
Golden Backpack Program, Inc.  
Good Food Collective  
Gracefull Community Cafe' and Foundation  
Growing Home  
Healthy Community Food Systems  
Healthy Family, Farms, and Communities  
Healthy Food Strategies  
Herbal Gardens Wellness  
Hunger Free Colorado  
Intentional Inquiry  
International Rescue Committee  
InterTran Energy Consulting  
JeffCo Parent Teacher Association  
Jefferson County Food Policy Council  
Jones and Chao, P.C.  
Kaizen Food Rescue  
Kingdom Empowerment Enterprise  
Kitchen Sync Strategies  
Las Animas School District No. RE-1  
Leffler Family Farms  
LiveWell Colorado  
National Young Farmers Coalition  
Mental Health Center of Denver  
Micro Farms LLC  
Personal Assistance Services of Colorado  
Pikes Peak Farm to School  
The Pinon Project  
Project Angel Heart  
Rocky Mountain Farmers Union  
The Same Plate  
San Luis Valley Local Foods Coalition  
Sangre de Cristo School  
Severe Weather Shelter Network  
Sprout City Farms  
Stonebridge Farm  
Support JeffCo Kids  
THRIVE Partners

Tri-County Health Department  
Uplands Community Collective  
UpRoot Colorado  
The Valley Food Partnership  
We Don't Waste