

For More Information Contact Rural Coalition at [deshawn@ruralco.org](mailto:deshawn@ruralco.org), [lpicciano@ruralco.org](mailto:lpicciano@ruralco.org) or Alianza Nacional de Campesinas, [mariadeluna@campesinasunite.org](mailto:mariadeluna@campesinasunite.org), [mily@campesinasunite.org](mailto:mily@campesinasunite.org)

31 August 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader, U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Minority Leader, U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader, U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

## **Pandemic Response to Protect and Increase Resilience in the Food and Farm System**

Dear Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, Leader Schumer, and Leader McCarthy:

The coronavirus pandemic has exposed and exacerbated vulnerabilities and inequities in our food system, disproportionately harming tribal, immigrant and communities of color, farmworkers and food system workers, small and mid-scale farmers, historically underserved, tribal and beginning family farmers and ranchers, and low-income consumers, including children. Without immediate targeted relief, the stability of our food supply, and the lives and livelihoods of farmers and essential farm and food system workers are at risk, further harming already, and increasingly, precarious communities.

We, the undersigned groups, urge Congress in crafting COVID-19 relief to immediately address three critical, interconnected issues: **the disproportionate suffering and exclusion of food, farm, and seafood system workers and small-scale producers from relief; a collapsing economy, and increasing food supply disruptions; and the urgent need for healthcare and economic assistance for marginalized communities**, all of which profoundly affect tribal, immigrant and rural communities of color. Congress must employ a holistic approach to restore and grow resilience in the food, farm, and seafood system in an equitable and just manner for all who labor within and are sustained by it.

### **Essential Food, Farming and Seafood System Workers**

Despite being deemed “essential,” millions of farm, fish and food workers throughout our food system have labored on the frontlines largely unseen and unprotected. Across the country, workers and their families have contracted the virus in rural and agricultural communities, which are least equipped to respond. Because they lack basic protections and adequate wages, many are forced to work and travel to work in cramped, unsafe conditions; and reside in crowded houses with no place to self-quarantine. Workers, many of whom are temporary guestworkers, immigrants and refugees, often lack healthcare access or fear accessing medical services--concerns particularly heightened among undocumented workers, who comprise about half of our country’s crop farmworker labor force and are subject to immigration enforcement<sup>1</sup>. Immigration exclusions in federal relief bills have left many workers without the much-needed assistance afforded to other workers. These exclusions are especially detrimental for farmworker women and other women working in the food system who face greater job insecurity<sup>2</sup>,

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<sup>1</sup>U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. Farm Labor: Legal Status and Migration Practices of Hired Crop Farmworkers. 22 April 2020, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/farm-economy/farm-labor/#legalstatus>.

<sup>2</sup>In testimonies collected by Alianza Nacional de Campesinas, farmworker women and other women working in the food system report significant loss of work hours and income as a result of the pandemic.

increased child and family care-giving responsibilities<sup>3</sup>, and the intensified incidence of gender-based violence<sup>4</sup> during the pandemic.

### **Small, Beginning, and Historically Underserved Family Farmers and Rural Communities**

Small and beginning farmers, including historically underserved farmers and ranchers, report decreasing income, prices below the costs of production, and challenges accessing pandemic relief programs due to bureaucratic barriers, program ineligibility, and lack of broadband access. Their families also face loss of off-farm jobs and associated employer-provided health care, further stressing them and rural hospitals and health systems. The current emergency response for the agricultural sector, including the Small Business Administration (SBA) forgivable loan programs<sup>5</sup>, the USDA Farmers to Families Food Box Program<sup>6</sup> and the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program<sup>7</sup> have gaps that leave unaddressed COVID-19 associated losses for most small and mid-scale farmers. These producers, many concentrated in the specialty crop and livestock sectors, require targeted support to weather severe delays in meat processing and the loss of marketing channels, such as restaurants and farmers markets, and to cover annual loan payments to prevent loss of the farms and collapse in land value and credit markets. Food system-wide support is essential to help these producers adapt production to shifting markets in upcoming seasons, and to assume a more fundamental role in directly meeting local food needs, especially for vulnerable populations.

**In order to protect and build food system resilience, Congress must provide ongoing COVID-19 relief that:**

#### **Assures protections for farmworkers, fish and food system workers and their communities**

- Issuance and enforcement of an Emergency Temporary Standard (ETS) and Permanent Standard from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA);
- Employment safeguards that require and assist employers to protect all workers, including adequate personal protective equipment, paid sick days, emergency family and medical leave, premium pay, workers compensation, and child-care, regardless of immigration status or size of employer;
- Upgrade farmworker housing and transportation to meet all relevant standards, including emergency public health standards;
- Automatic visa extensions and work permit renewals for all workers, including Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients and Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holders;

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<sup>3</sup> With massive school and day-care closures, women report facing the stark choice between working to support their families or caring safely for their children. Interviews with farmworkers also revealed that during the pandemic the sole income in immigrant households is often provided by the younger generation, including DACA recipients. See also the recent [California Institute for Rural Studies](#) COVID-19 study.

<sup>4</sup> Farmworker and other women report increased incidence of gender-based violence (GBV), including domestic violence and sexual harassment, since lockdowns were imposed as a result of the pandemic.

<sup>5</sup> Payments for small scale farmers who do qualify for the SBA's Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDL) based on non-existent payrolls or minimal net income do not cover the full range of financial losses and costs from COVID-19.

<sup>6</sup> The quickly assembled USDA Farmers to Families Food Box program often favored large entities, bypassing small farmers better positioned to feed local communities, and provided sometimes substandard food, if any, to many low-income and rural community members. Data on how this program has benefitted local and regional producers has not been released.

<sup>7</sup> The USDA Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) direct payments covers only producers with losses at the beginning of the year for certain commodities, providing minimal if any support to small farmers and ranchers with diverse products, higher value crops or markets, or later planting seasons.

deferred action and automatic work authorization for Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers;  
and

- Direct service programs and assistance for all survivors of gender-based violence and their families, including immigrants and temporary guestworkers.

**Sustains small and mid-scale farmers, ranchers and fishers including support for farm and food programs that increase food system resilience for rural, agricultural, immigrant and low-income communities**

- Structural assistance, grants, loans, and price support sufficient to maintain the food supply and support transportation, distribution, and storage of goods with a focus on local food systems;
- Increased targeted assistance for small and mid-scale diversified farmers, ranchers and fishers including compensation for food provided to directly to communities and families who need it;
- Direct debt forgiveness for small farmers, ranchers, and fishers, especially those historically underserved, with a gross income of \$300,000 or less over the previous five years;
- Comprehensive debt restructuring and a farm foreclosure moratorium;
- Sustained emergency pandemic food assistance for those who need it, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); the Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT); universal free feeding program (Seamless Summer Feeding Option)<sup>8</sup>; child and elder nutrition programs;
- Increased resilience by connecting farm, ranch and seafood producers to directly supply feeding programs, including farm to school, school lunch, and institutional feeding programs; and
- Amending the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) to allow farmers, ranchers and fishers to use gross income instead of net income as the basis of their forgivable loan amount.

**Assures basic health, safety, economic security, education, housing and representation for rural and tribal communities**

- Ensure COVID-19 testing for everyone, treatment and care, regardless of immigration status or ability to pay, and covering materials and services for people with Limited English Proficiency (LEP);
- Ensure access to affordable health care coverage for everyone, including through Medicaid expansion;
- Ensure all taxpayers, including filers with social security numbers or other individual tax identification numbers (ITIN), receive retroactive stimulus payments and any further payments or financial relief;
- Automatic extension of unemployment benefits for the duration of the pandemic, including the \$600 supplemental pandemic unemployment benefit, as well as expanding Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and other income support programs;
- Emergency investments in pre-K to 12 education to assure continuity of learning for all students, including by remote learning, with equitable access for students with special needs; expansion of broadband and computer access;
- Emergency rental assistance, with eviction moratorium, and debt forgiveness throughout the duration of the pandemic;

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<sup>8</sup> School districts strongly support extension of the Seamless Summer Feeding option to provide free meals to all K-12 students during the FY2021 school year. Farmers and school authorities emphasize that local produce purchases are a significant contributor to diversified small farm incomes and crucial to the healthy meals provided. School administrators stress the importance of universal access because many immigrant families fear that applying directly for public benefits, such as free breakfast/lunch, will jeopardize their eligibility for legal citizenship.

- An immediate moratorium on immigration enforcement activities, including detentions and deportations;
- Emergency expansion of early and absentee voting by mail to ensure the voting rights and representation of rural and agricultural communities during the pandemic; and
- Extension of the statutory reapportionment and data review reporting deadlines for the 2020 Census, and additional funding for counting operations.

We thank you for your leadership and stand ready to work with you during this challenging time.

Sincerely,

National Organizations

ActionAid USA, Washington, DC  
 Agricultural Justice Project, Gainesville, FL  
 Agricultural Missions, Inc., New York, NY  
 Agroecology Research-Action Collective, Oakland, CA  
 Alianza Nacional de Campesinas, Inc., Oxnard, CA  
 American Sustainable Business Council, Washington, DC  
 American Indian Mothers Inc., Shannon, NC  
 Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (AFL-CIO) Washington, DC  
 ASISTA, Suffield, CT  
 Bread for the World, Washington, DC  
 Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment, Multistate  
 Casa de Esperanza: National Latin@ Network for Healthy Families and Communities, St. Paul, MN  
 Center for Biological Diversity, Saint Petersburg, FL  
 Center for Justice & Democracy, New York  
 Centro de los Derechos del Migrante, Inc., Baltimore, MD  
 Christian Reformed Church Office of Social Justice, Grand Rapids, MI  
 Church World Service, Washington DC  
 Coming Clean, Brattleboro, VT  
 Community Food and Justice Coalition, Oakland, CA  
 Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S Provinces, Silver Spring, MD  
 Data for Justice, Louisville, KY  
 Disciples Refugee & Immigration Ministries, Washington DC  
 Earthjustice, Washington, DC  
 Empire State Consumer Project, Rochester, NY  
 Empowering Pacific Islander Communities, Los Angeles, CA  
 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Washington, DC  
 Family Farm Defenders, Madison, WI  
 Farm Aid, Cambridge, MA  
 Farmworker Justice, Washington, DC  
 Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund, East Point, GA  
 Feminist Majority Foundation, Arlington, VA  
 Food & Water Action, Washington, DC  
 Franciscan Action Network, Washington DC  
 Friends of the Earth, Washington, DC  
 HEAL Food Alliance, Chicago, IL  
 Hempstead Project Heart, Keshena, WI

Hispanic Federation, Washington, DC  
Human Rights Watch, Washington, DC  
Immigration Hub, Washington, DC  
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, Minneapolis, MN  
Justice for Migrant Women, Fremont, Ohio  
Labor Council for Latin American Advancement, Washington, DC  
Land For Good, Keene, NH  
Leadership Conference of Women Religious, Silver Spring, MD  
Livelihoods Knowledge Exchange Network, Lexington, KY  
MADE SAFE, Dobbs Ferry, NY  
MomsRising, National  
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, Silver Spring, MD  
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF), Washington, DC  
National Association of Social Workers, Washington, DC  
National Council of Asian Pacific Americans, Washington, DC  
National Family Farm Coalition, Washington, DC  
National Farm to School Network, Washington, DC  
National Farm Worker Ministry, Raleigh, NC  
National Immigrant Farming Initiative Inc., Washington DC  
National Latino Farmers & Ranchers Trade Association, Washington, DC  
National Network for Immigrant & Refugee Rights, Oakland, CA  
National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, El Paso Tx.  
National Organization for Women, Washington, DC  
National Young Farmers Coalition, Washington, DC  
Natural Resources Defense Council, New York City, NY  
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice, Washington, DC  
Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance, Gloucester, MA  
Organic Consumers Association Finland, MN  
Organic Seed Alliance, Port Townsend, WA  
Oxfam America, Boston, MA  
People's Parity Project, Cambridge, MA  
Pesticide Action Network, Berkeley, CA  
Progressive Agriculture Organization, Meshoppen, PA  
Public Advocacy for Kids (PAK), Washington, DC  
Real Food Media, Minneapolis, MN  
Rural Advancement Foundation International-USA (RAFI-USA), Pittsboro, NC  
Rural Advancement Fund of the National Sharecroppers Fund, Inc., Orangeburg, SC  
Rural Coalition, Washington, DC  
Rural Development Leadership Network, New York, NY  
Sciencecorps, Manchester, MA  
Sierra Club, Oakland, CA  
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas - Justice Team, Silver Spring, MD  
Slow Food USA, NY  
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC), Washington, DC and Sacramento, CA  
Student Action with Farmworkers, Durham, NC  
T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights, New York, NY  
Tahirih Justice Center, Falls Church, VA  
Union for Reform Judaism, Washington, DC

William C. Velásquez Institute, San Antonio, TX  
Women, Food and Agriculture Network, Story City, IA  
Women's Voices for the Earth, Missoula, MT  
Workplace Fairness, Washington, DC  
World Farmers, Lancaster, MA  
Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights, Chicago, IL

#### Regional, State and Local Organizations

Alabama State Association of Cooperatives, Epes, AL  
American Federation of Government Employees, St. Louis, MO  
Arkansas Land and Farm Development Corporation, Brinkley, AK  
Beyond Toxics, Eugene, OR  
Black Farmers & Ranchers New Mexico, Jarales, NM  
Border Agricultural Workers Project, El Paso, TX  
California Institute for Rural Studies, Davis, CA  
Campesinos Sin Fronteras, Somerton, AZ  
Campesinos Sin Fronteras, Yuma, AZ  
CASA del Llano, Inc, Hereford, TX  
Catskill Mountainkeeper, Livingston Manor, NY  
Center for a Sustainable Coast, Saint Simons Island, GA  
Centro Latino Americano, Eugene, OR  
CitySeed, New Haven, CT  
Clean and Healthy New York, Albany, NY  
Clean Power Lake County, Waukegan, IL  
Community Alliance for Global Justice, Seattle, WA  
Community Farm Alliance, Berea, KY  
Consumer Federation of California, Sacramento, CA  
Cottage House, Inc. Ariton, AL  
Dakota Rural Action, Brookings, SD  
Ecotrust, Portland, OR  
Endangered Habitats League, Los Angeles, CA  
Episcopal Farmworker Ministry, Dunn, NC  
Faith Action Network - Washington State, Seattle, WA  
Faith in Place, Chicago, IL  
Faith in Place Action Fund, Chicago, IL  
Familias en Acción, Portland OR  
Farmworker Association of Florida, Apopka, FL  
Food for Maine's Future, Knox, ME  
Future Generations Collaborative, Portland, OR  
Green State Solutions, Iowa City, IA  
Grupo AMOR de Homestead /Coalición Rural, Homestead, FL  
Haitian Bridge Alliance, San Diego, CA  
Kansas Rural Center, KA  
La Asociación Campesina de Florida, Apopka, FL  
La Mujer Obrera, El Paso, TX  
Landowners Association of Texas, Liberty, TX  
Lariza Garzon, Dunn, NC

Lowlander Center, Gray, LA  
Maine Center for Economic Policy, Augusta, ME  
Mississippi Association of Cooperatives, Jackson, MS  
Mujeres Campesinas Unidas de Florida, Immokalee, FL  
Multicultural Efforts to End Sexual Assault (MESA), West Lafayette, IN  
NC FIELD, Kinston, NC  
North Carolina Association of Black Lawyers Land Loss Prevention Project, Durham, NC  
North Carolina Farmworkers' Project, Benson, NC  
North Carolina Justice Center, Raleigh, NC  
Northeast Organic Farming Association - New Hampshire Chapter, Concord, NH  
Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Jersey (NOFA-NJ), NJ  
Northeast Organic Farming Association-Interstate Council, Barre, MA  
Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont, Richmond, VT  
Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, Kingston, NY  
Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides, Eugene, OR  
Northwest Communities Education Center/ Radio KDNA, Granger, WA  
Ohio Immigrant Alliance, Cleveland, OH  
Oklahoma Black Historical Research Project, Inc., Oklahoma City, OK  
One Oregon, OR  
Operation Spring Plant, Oxford, NC  
Oregon Health Equity Alliance (OHEA), Portland, OR  
Oregon Interfaith Movement for Immigrant Justice, OR  
Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility, Portland, OR  
Organización en California de Líderes Campesinas, Inc., Oxnard, CA  
Pennsylvania Council of Churches, Harrisburg, PA  
Physicians for Social Responsibility Maine Chapter, Portland, OR  
Portland Japanese American Citizens League, Portland, OR  
Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada, NV  
Racial Justice in Eastern Oregon, La Grande, OR  
Racial Justice Organizing Committee, Salem, OR  
Refugee Resettlement Coalition of Lane County, Springfield, OR  
Rural Vermont, VT  
SEIU Oregon State Council, OR  
Spokane Farmland Preservation Working Group, Spokane, WA  
Texas/Mexico Border Coalition Community-based Organization, San Isidro, TX  
Toxic Free NC, Durham, NC  
Unidos Bridging Community, McMinnville, OR  
Virginia Association of Biological Farming, Montvale, VA  
Wind of the Spirit Immigrant Resource Center, Morristown, NJ  
Worker Justice Center of New York, Kingston, NY  
Workers Center of Central New York, Syracuse, NY

Cc: Members of Congress