

WASHINGTON STATE FOOD POLICY FORUM

Early Implementation Action Report

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Table of Acronyms

Acronym	Definition
CARES Act	Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act
CD	Conservation Districts
CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CDFI	Community Development Financial Institutions
CSA	Community Supported Agriculture
DOH	Washington State Department of Health
DSHS	Washington State Department of Social and Health Services
EBT	Electronic Benefit Transfer
FINI	Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive
FMNP	Farmers Market Nutrition Programs
GAP/GHP	Good Agricultural Practices/Good Handling Practices
GusNIP	Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program
L&I	Washington State Department of Labor and Industries
OFPP	Office of Farmland Preservation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
SBA	Small Business Administration
SCC	Washington State Conservation Commission
SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
WIC	Women, Infants, and Children
WSDA	Washington State Department of Agriculture
WSFMA	Washington State Farmers Market Association
WSHFC	Washington State Housing and Finance Commission
WSU	Washington State University

Overview

The Washington State Food Policy Forum (Forum), representing a unique cross-section of food system stakeholders and agriculture production sectors, has an important perspective on how COVID-19 is and will continue to impact our state's food system.¹ Many of the challenges impacting Washington's food system in light of COVID-19 touch on the Forum's 2019 consensus recommendations, which highlight food system vulnerabilities and opportunities that are particularly apparent under COVID-19.

In response to a request from the Washington State Governor's Office, the Forum worked from March to June 2020 to identify early implementation actions that tie to its 2019 recommendations and consider challenges and opportunities presented by the COVID-19 crisis and response. See Appendix C for details on the Forum's process.

The actions detailed in this report are organized based upon their immediate-term, near-term, and mid-term opportunity time horizons. Some will require state action. Others will require action by the federal government. And some actions encourage fostering and strengthening public/private partnerships to take advantage of existing infrastructure and limited resources.

With an extended network of public and private sector organizations across the food system, the Forum is well suited to identify and support early action efforts (now and nine months from now) to keep the state's food system functioning for all in light of COVID-19.

About the Food Policy Forum

The Washington State Legislature initially created the Food Policy Forum (Forum) through a budget proviso in 2016 and, in 2017, provided additional funding to support the Forum through June 2019. In 2020, the Washington State Legislature formally established the Forum in statute.

The Legislature asked the Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC) "to convene and facilitate a food policy forum." The Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) and the Office of Farmland Preservation (OFP) work in partnership with SCC to convene and manage the Forum. Ross Strategic is contracted by SCC to provide facilitation support.

The Forum is a valuable venue for food security interests and agricultural producers to address needed changes to our state's food system.

¹Goals of the Food Policy Forum: (1) Increase direct marketing sales and consumption of Washington-grown foods; (2) Expand and promote programs that bring healthy and nutritious Washington-grown foods to Washington residents; (3) Examine ways to encourage retention of an adequate number of farmers for small scale farms, meet the educational needs for the next generation of farmers, and provide for the continued economic viability of local food production, processing, and distribution in the state; (4) Reduce food insecurity and hunger in the state; and (5) Identify ways to improve coordination and communication among local food policy entities and communication between the local food policy entities and state agencies

This report outlines 59 consensus² implementation actions for consideration. Each action includes potential implementors for consideration. Actions are organized into three general time intervals:

Immediate-Term	July to September 2020
Near-Term	October to December 2020
Mid-Term	January 2021 to March 2021

Immediate-Term Actions

The Forum identified the following 26 immediate-term actions.

Challenge #1: COVID-19 threatens both the near and long-term economic viability of individual agriculture and food enterprises; these businesses need appropriate relief and relevant services to continue to remain economically viable and operational as they pivot to serve new market and operating demands during the pandemic and beyond.

Opportunity: Identify and provide economic relief and stimulus in the near term that is responsive and appropriate to needs the full diversity of our agricultural sectors and enterprise types.

Early Action #	Description	Potential Implementors
A	Make relevant, timely public health and safety information, technical assistance, and funds available to farms, ranches, and food businesses so they can operate and transport essential food and agricultural products in accordance with CDC guidelines. DOH, WSDA, and WSU are working on public safety of the food system.	DOH, L&I, WSDA, WSU
B	Explicitly include small, direct, and regional marketing farms in small business, workforce, and emergency payments or loan programs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> USDA responses should include all types of crops and livestock production systems, including highly diversified farms that receive direct market retail prices for their products. Include beginning farmers who may not yet have records of previous sales income. Provide direct financial assistance to critical supply chain businesses, food system workers, and food establishments. 	USDA/CARES Act, Department of Commerce, WSDA

²Working definition of consensus is “I can live with it.”

C ³	Stabilize lines of credit, extend collateral positions, and create a guarantee fund to allow lines of credit from banks or credit unions. Consider work and activity by NW Farm Credit Services, CDFIs like Craft3 and Business Impact Northwest, and look to Department of Commerce and Office of Financial Management.	SBA, USDA FSA, Banks and Credit Unions, CDFI's, Microenterprise Lenders, WA Dept, of Commerce.
D	Explore whether production lines of credit (loans to farmers to buy seed, amendments, etc.; requires having a contract in hand) can be re-negotiated to relieve financial strain on farmers from major swings in the market. Defer payments with interest continuing so that farmers have more time to determine what markets are viable.	USDA FSA, Banks and Credit Unions,
E	Increase business technical support to offer one-on-one counseling to small and mid-scale farm and food enterprises to among other things make sure businesses are ready to receive funding, develop business plans etc., and take advantage of opportunities like new markets. <i>Case Example: Chelan Douglas Regional Port Authority, Community Foundation of NCW, and 501 Commons have teamed up to help non-profits apply for emergency assistance and position themselves for other funding through National Economic Development Council.</i>	WA Dept, Of Commerce, Washington Government Agencies, Small and Mid-Scale Farm and Food Enterprises
F	Develop ombudsman/woman position at the state to coordinate and share information regarding relief resources and services to help individual farmers understand and access the resources available to them. The economic relief, funding, and financing landscape is changing daily and it is hard for technical assistance service providers to keep up with the changes. There are many resources being deployed now through WSDA Regional Markets, WSU Food Systems Program, Farm King County, and others are working to provide comprehensive information on what is available. However, that does not mean it is easy to navigate for farmers, as they have to go to all the individual programs that are available.	Washington Government Agencies, Policymakers
G	Support technical assistance providers (e.g., local CDs, WSU, SCC, WSDA, etc.) using state or federal dollars to work with producers to tackle a variety of issues related to pivoting from one market to another. Farmers need technical assistance to move to wholesale or retail markets. Assistance needs include: food safety regulations; information and guidance on packaging, cooling, post-harvest handling, farm management in terms of production and volume; new and different equipment to cultivate and plant for new markets; and product standardization requirements.	Washington Government Agencies, Policymakers, Local CDs, WSU, SCC, WSDA

Opportunity: Offer growers and agricultural enterprises market cultivation assistance, business support services, and technical assistance to serve viable markets.

³ This action received one stand aside vote. Stand aside votes do not count against consensus. Description of stand aside votes are captured in Appendix D.

Early Action #	Description	Potential Implementors
A	Develop business-to-business needs and assets linkage opportunities to support matchmaking between producers and products, markets, and available processing and logistics infrastructure.	WSDA, CDs, WSU

Opportunity: Provide cost-share, small grants, or public-private financing to help farms and food system businesses shoulder the cost of pivoting to serving new markets and meeting increased demand for locally-marketing producers.

Early Action #	Description	Potential Implementors
A	Allow for flexibility in the USDA Local Agriculture Market Programs (LAMP) to more quickly and effectively provide support to regional food systems in line with that program’s purpose. Relax or remove eligibility and matching fund requirements and expedite review and approval under the Farmers Market Promotion Program, the Local Food Promotion Program, and the Value Added Producer Grant Program. These existing programs are important sources of capital for local food systems and small- mid scale farms and value-added processors. The grants have been very successful at supporting development of local and regional food systems. Expand and make these programs more accessible to build on the successful programs.	WSDA, USDA, Policymakers, Municipalities

Challenge #2: COVID-19 public health responses resulted in transformational shifts in the food system requiring systems-level supports and investment to maintain the functional capacity and flexibility of our food system to meet immediate needs and build resiliency for an uncertain future.

Opportunity: Recognize and support farmers markets as essential components of our food and agriculture system that provide public benefit as important access points to healthy foods and are foundational for local food economies.

Early Action #	Description	Potential Implementors
A	Enable farmers markets to expand their sites using public or private land so that social distancing and all other public health directives can be maintained while serving a greater (sustaining) number of farmers and shoppers.	WSFMA, WSDA, Local Government Agencies
B	Provide a public stabilization package to farmers market organizations (to replace lost revenue) so that they can be leveraged for current and additional sales through new/hybrid direct-to-consumer models and preserve market infrastructure and community assets.	WSFMA, Washington Government Agencies, Policymakers

C	Support farmers markets' ability to develop alternative and hybrid models for servicing all customers (e.g., individuals, CSA, institutions, and wholesale), including pre-orders and drive through markets, by helping to secure and fund permits; access existing online platforms, train vendors, and pay staff.	WSFMA, WSDA, Local Government Agencies
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Opportunity: Identify opportunities in the immediate, near and mid-term to reorient, improve, and develop food system infrastructure (including processing, storage, aggregation and distribution) for a variety of agricultural enterprises to ensure economic viability during this crisis and beyond

Early Action #	Description	Potential Implementors
A	<p>Reorient and reallocate existing chilled transportation infrastructure to ensure adequate transportation capacity. There is existing and available transportation capacity to make deliveries. Explore developing a network of 'mom and pop' shops that have cold and dry storage.</p> <p><i>Case Example: NW Harvest is planning to hire a few LINC Foods drivers/trucks for delivery to eastern WA food pantries; Rotary First Harvest is matching excess food with excess trucking. WSU Extension in Stevens County has developed a model that uses small refrigerated trailers to deliver fresh produce to stores and foodbanks in Spokane, Stevens and Pend Oreille counties that could be scaled up.</i></p>	Government Agencies, Private Businesses, WSU, Agricultural Resource Providers, Non-profit Organizations
B	<p>Use existing Washington-based distribution networks (e.g., Amazon, Charlie's Produce, small and mid-sized food hubs, other smaller distribution networks, etc.) to get Washington-grown products directly to consumers. Reach out to existing networks to understand what capacity there is in the system. Consider conducting a survey of licensed distributors in the state to learn more.</p> <p><i>Case Example: Snohomish County is exploring partnering with Sysco and Charlie's Produce to get product to customers. Chelan and Douglas County Community Action Council is developing a mobile food pantry that will regularly rotate through remote points of the region to provide fresh local food in coordination with community health, WorkSource, bookmobile, and other services.</i></p>	WSU Extension, WSDA, DOH/Local ACHs, Private Businesses, Agricultural Resource Providers, Non-profit Organizations, NW Cooperative Development Center (NWCDC)
C	<p>Reactivate the supply chains to keep lights on in our food businesses like restaurants and institutions (schools, hospitals, etc.). Support restaurants in preparing meals for institutional needs. Provide stimulus dollars to cover the difference between keeping-lights-on costs for restaurants and purchase price.</p> <p><i>Case Example: Center for Good Food Purchasing is developing this idea in Los Angeles. Snohomish County will be implementing something similar as well.</i></p>	Policymakers, Government Agencies, Philanthropy, Private Businesses, Funders (e.g., philanthropic, public, or private investors)

Challenge #3: COVID-19 has increased the need for nutrition services and assistance due to massive unemployment and economic insecurity for Washingtonians.

Opportunity: Ensure expansive and comprehensive nutrition services and assistance reach children, adults, and seniors in need.

Early Action #	Description	Potential Implementors
A	State organizations should deliver aligned messaging to educate funders and local and state decision-makers on food security as an integral part of the state’s public health response to COVID-19, with the goal of ensuring resources to address food system challenges related to the pandemic.	Government Agencies; Funders; Policymakers

Opportunity: Support growers and people in need by: Purchasing food from Washington growers, including small and mid-scale farms.

Early Action #	Description	Potential Implementors
A	Support the “Farmers Feeding Families Coronavirus Response Act” introduced in Congress. The bill would provide much needed additional funding to purchase goods from small and medium farmers and producers who are sitting on surplus crops and provide them to food banks and food assistance programs who are facing unprecedented demands. If passed, the bill will direct USDA to allocate a portion of federal commodities purchased for food banks from direct-to-market businesses like food hubs, agriculture cooperatives, and producer associations as well as small and mid-scale producers. The bill also authorizes USDA to give funds directly to state agencies to purchase food for food banks from producers within the state.	Policymakers, USDA
B	Allow the Secretary of Agriculture maximum flexibility to use Stafford Act Section 32 funds and Families First Coronavirus Act Section 101(g) to purchase foods from local producers during Presidentially-declared emergencies and disasters.	Policymakers
C	Request USDA approval of extension of Washington’s disaster household food distribution plan to help move unused food as needed.	USDA, WA Government Agencies
D	Monitor implementation of USDA Coronavirus Farm Assistance Program (CFAP). Depending on availability of resources, this is an opportunity to help food distributors connect with food banks, food hubs, and small and mid-scale producers to design emergency food boxes targeting areas of high need and limited resources and purchase from local producers.	USDA, WA Government Agencies, Producers, Food Distributors, and Markets

E	Allow state agencies to purchase eligible foods in bulk to ensure that farm products do not go to waste and are accessible to all who need food during this emergency.	Policymakers, Government Agencies
F	Ensure public schools have adequate funding and flexibility to purchase needed food products, and to purchase from local farms. Available Washington-grown food might be at a higher price point than institutional buyers can afford. Use federal and state dollars to help make Washington-grown purchases. Allow TEFAP Farm to Food Bank funds (FTFB) to be used for purchase, transport, and storage of commodities from local producers that would have otherwise been sold through direct marketing or institutional procurement that are not operating as a result of COVID-19 social distancing measures.	Policymakers, Government Agencies, Public Schools
G	Maintain or increase capacity of the WSDA Regional Markets Program to facilitate farm to market connections, including to schools, childcares and other food access programs. During a crisis – whether a pandemic, a weather related or other act of nature, or an economic crisis – the state needs to have the ability to respond immediately to food needs. By facilitating connections between farms, small distributors, and schools, Regional Markets helps build and maintain connections in local supply chains. A robust WSDA Regional Markets Program will help the state be prepared for such a response.	Policymakers, WSDA
H	Fund purchases of locally grown food for food pantries across the state as coordinated by Food Lifeline, Northwest Harvest, and Second Harvest.	Food Pantries, Government Agencies; Community Based Organizations

Opportunity: Support growers and people in need by: Helping people use their benefits to buy fresh and local products.

Early Action #	Description	Potential Implementors
A	Ensure service organizations and people are aware of the flexibilities being created by USDA and others to access benefits like SNAP, school meals, etc. and relief programs. This would help take pressure of the food bank system. Ensure the state is taking advantage of available federal programs. <i>Case Example: Community Foundation NCW provided a grant to the Wenatchee Valley Farmer's Market to enable the market to increase the SNAP match benefits to 50% as an incentive to encourage people to buy local food.</i>	DOH, NGOs and Partner Organizations

B	<p>Request Congress to grant USDA the authority to reduce or remove 100% matching fund requirements and expedite review and approval under the federal Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentives Program (GusNIP) grant. Grant applications opened for GusNIP's FY2020 cycle on March 13 and proposals were due May 18, with \$41.5 million in awards available. DOH applied for this grant as part of the state's Fruit and Vegetable Incentives Program. Foundations and community benefit organizations that would be sources of match are focusing funds on COVID-19 related items or are unable to commit funding because of financial uncertainty, making it difficult to fundraise. An expedited review process would allow DOH, if awarded a grant, to begin expansion to more grocery stores in fall 2020 and provide more fruit and vegetable incentives to SNAP clients.</p>	<p>Policymakers, USDA, DOH, Foundations and Community Benefit Organizations</p>
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Equity

Many of the actions the Forum has developed seek to address food system vulnerabilities, some of which have disproportionate impacts on different populations and industry sectors. Existing disparities in Washington's food system have been exacerbated by COVID-19. Following guidance from the Governor, which directs state agencies to develop budget proposals using an equity lens, in the 2021 fiscal year the Forum will do the same in its own work, by identifying how actions and recommendations of the Forum impact equitable outcomes for Washingtonians. Since its inception, the Forum has taken a systems approach to the challenges and opportunities in our food system; the Forum recognizes that this includes analysis of potentially disparate effects on the diversity of geographic and demographic communities as we work to achieve a food system that provides healthy food for all people in Washington.

In pursuing an equity lens, the Forum will consider a number of questions, including:

1. How has COVID-19 exacerbated racial/ethnic disparities in the elements of the food system identified in the report?
2. How are individuals and families who are facing economic insecurity in the food system impacted by COVID-19?
3. In what ways might the actions of this report be employed to reduce inequities based on racial, ethnic, or economic disparity?
4. What perspectives does the Forum need to engage with to inform an equity approach to implementation of the actions contained in this report?

Vulnerabilities in Washington's Food System

Our state's response to the pandemic, while necessary to protect human health and slow the spread of the virus, has dramatically impacted Washington's food system. Closures of food service, hospitality, and tourism sectors have caused immediate and ongoing loss of critical markets and revenue for farmers; restaurants, schools and institutions have closed; farmers markets and on-farm retail and agritourism have been modified and sales have been severely limited. The impacts are immediate and significant for farmers and ranchers who rely on these direct markets and institutional buyers in our state: food service at universities, corporate campuses, and the hospitality and event industries. Farms who rely on farmers market sales must make decisions now about annual investments in labor and operations with no certainty that market channels will be open for their products.

Many of the challenges Washington must address now in light of COVID-19 reflect the Forum's 2019 consensus recommendations, which respond to the vulnerabilities and opportunities that are particularly apparent under COVID-19.

Below are some examples of the way COVID-19 is impacting Washington's food system:

- The stay at home order, the travel restrictions, and social distancing requirements needed to contain the spread of COVID-19 have exacerbated existing access barriers to nutrition assistance programs for seniors and children participating in school, childcare, and after school meal programs.

- Restaurants and institutional food services have closed due to stay at home orders, severely reducing the customer base for farmers and their products. Farms and food enterprises need to navigate a temporarily disrupted food system while ensuring they are around for whatever 'after COVID' looks like.
- Loss of jobs and income means the number of people in need of food assistance and access to healthy food is higher than ever before. Concurrently, existing pressures and inflexibilities within our food system are exacerbated. For example, increased demand at food banks has strained the food bank system (e.g., insufficient food to meet demand; lack of facilities to handle certain foods, such as perishable foods and frozen foods, etc.)
- Household demand for products from Washington farmers is surging but blocked by market closures and weak links in the food value chain. Over the last half century food processing and distribution industries have transformed or migrated leaving a gap in much-needed processing, storage, and distribution infrastructure to serve local and regional markets (such as lack of access to USDA meat processing plants for small scale meat producers.).
- Pre-COVID-19 barriers to markets that have impeded seemingly logical connections between small- and mid-sized farms and local and regional customers are exacerbated by the scope of the need and pressures on local food supply chains that are trying to pick up some of the new through put. The absence of such processing and distribution channels can mean unnecessary waste of food that cannot be immediately sold to end users.
- In the last two decades, the number of acres of agricultural land in production in Washington fell by over one million acres and the number of farms declined by 10 percent. Pressure on farmland related to land costs, loss of farms due to a difficult business environment, and transitions in ownership driven by generational and business changes are particularly heightened during COVID-19.
- Existing regulations make it difficult for the local food system to quickly adapt to changing market demand. For example, USDA certification of meat processing is not transferred to WSDA to provide additional capacity.

Actions implemented now to respond to immediate needs during the COVID-19 crisis have the potential to shape the food system in a positive, long-lasting way for generations to come. Washington's \$49 billion food and agricultural system is extremely diverse, with over 300 different commodities produced.⁴ Washington is unique in its diversity of agricultural scale which is an advantage we can build upon to respond to COVID-19 and develop resilience into the future. The hope is that we respond to the immediate needs presented by COVID-19 to develop, reinvent, and reinvest in regional food systems in our state in ways that address long-standing vulnerabilities and build food security and resilience into the future.

This report outlines opportunities and implementation actions that address the impacts of COVID-19 to Washington's food system.

Implementation Actions

Overview of Key Challenges

The COVID-19 crisis is highlighting a number of weaknesses in Washington's food system. These weaknesses include an unanticipated number of people needing food assistance; a severely disrupted food distribution system; the closure of restaurants and a restrained ability to purchase food; an immediate loss of key markets for producers due to closures; a government support system stretched by competing demands to address the health crisis, the economic crisis, and food availability challenges.

The Forum's implementation actions are organized by four challenges:

- 1. Challenge #1:** COVID-19 threatens both the near and long-term economic viability of individual agriculture and food enterprises; these businesses need appropriate relief and relevant services to continue to remain economically viable and operational as they pivot to serve new market and operating demands during the pandemic and beyond.
- 2. Challenge #2:** COVID-19 public health responses resulted in transformational shifts in the food system requiring systems-level supports and investment to maintain the functional capacity and flexibility of our food system to meet immediate needs and build resiliency for an uncertain future.
- 3. Challenge #3:** COVID-19 has increased the need for nutrition services and assistance due to massive unemployment and economic insecurity for Washingtonians.
- 4. Challenge #4:** COVID-19 underscores the need to foster resilience in the face of a changing climate to ensure long-term food security.

Challenge #1

COVID-19 threatens both the near and long-term economic viability of individual agriculture and food enterprises; these businesses need appropriate relief and relevant services to continue to remain economically viable and operational as they pivot to serve new market and operating demands during the pandemic and beyond.

COVID-19 has created unprecedented economic uncertainty and eliminated or reduced market access for agricultural producers across Washington, especially for farms selling at the regional and local level. Small scale farms make up the vast majority of farms by number in Washington (89%) and the majority of those (70%)⁵ sell through market channels that have closed entirely (e.g., restaurants, schools, and other institutions) or have been heavily impacted (e.g., farmers markets). This has led to an immediate loss of revenue and uncertain economic prospects characterized by high market risks.

Direct financial support to stop-gap losses and to invest in pivots to new markets is needed. Producers at all scales need direct financial assistance to continue to provide essential food system services while simultaneously investing to respond to market shifts, new logistics, and operating requirement costs in light of COVID-19 health and safety conditions. To be effective in implementation, economic relief must reflect the realities of the diverse sectors within Washington agriculture (scale, crops, markets, supply chains). Economic relief and stimulus responses need to explicitly include small, direct, and regionally marketing farms. Programs intended to assist direct and locally marketing farms should be relevant to characteristics of the sector.

Most small businesses, including farms in Washington, are operating with limited cash flow – 90 days of cash is the best-case scenario. Money in enterprises' hands can buy time in the face of immediate losses in revenue and operating capital. It can help fund the startup costs of 'market pivots' which are necessary for ongoing farm viability. Direct financial support can include direct payments, grants, cost shares, and or low-cost debt, or appropriately scaled public purchasing of products.

Farm and food businesses need targeted, relevant technical assistance to pivot business models, adapt marketing strategies, and respond to quickly changing regulatory requirements. The magnitude and the speed required for the pivot can be overwhelming and discourage otherwise attainable business efforts and innovations. Technical assistance and policy support to navigate new market opportunities and regulatory and public health realities would minimize obstacles to success.

Opportunity 1: Identify and provide economic relief and stimulus in the near term that is responsive and appropriate to needs the full diversity of our agricultural sectors and enterprise types.

There is significant uncertainty about what the new economy looks like and how farms can avoid going under due to debt. It is critical that we ensure economic stimulus responses explicitly address the economic and business needs of small, direct, and regionally marketing farms, including farmers market farms, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms, on-farm stores, u-pick and agritourism, food hubs and similar cooperative aggregation

⁵ Data from WSDA's Survey of Economic Impacts of COVID-19

and distribution models. Farm businesses need a financial bridge to weather the new pressures and changes in markets created by COVID-19.

Immediate-Term Actions

Early Action #	Description	Potential Implementors
A	<p>Make relevant, timely public health and safety information, technical assistance, and funds available to farms, ranches, and food businesses so they can operate and transport essential food and agricultural products in accordance with CDC guidelines. DOH, WSDA, and WSU are working on public safety of the food system.</p>	DOH, L&I, WSDA, WSU
B	<p>Explicitly include small, direct, and regional marketing farms in small business, workforce, and emergency payments or loan programs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USDA responses should include all types of crops and livestock production systems, including highly diversified farms that receive direct market retail prices for their products. Include beginning farmers who may not yet have records of previous sales income. • Provide direct financial assistance to critical supply chain businesses, food system workers, and food establishments. 	USDA/CARES Act, Department of Commerce, WSDA
C ⁶	<p>Stabilize lines of credit, extend collateral positions, and create a guarantee fund to allow lines of credit from banks or credit unions. Consider work and activity by NW Farm Credit Services, CDFIs like Craft3 and Business Impact Northwest, and look to Department of Commerce and Office of Financial Management.</p>	SBA, USDA FSA, Banks and Credit Unions, CDFI's, Microenterprise Lenders, WA Dept, of Commerce.
D	<p>Explore whether production lines of credit (loans to farmers to buy seed, amendments, etc.; requires having a contract in hand) can be re-negotiated to relieve financial strain on farmers from major swings in the market. Defer payments with interest continuing so that farmers have more time to determine what markets are viable.</p>	USDA FSA, Banks and Credit Unions,
E	<p>Increase business technical support to offer one-on-one counseling to small and mid-scale farm and food enterprises to among other things make sure businesses are ready to receive funding, develop business plans etc., and take advantage of opportunities like new markets.</p> <p><i>Case Example: Chelan Douglas Regional Port Authority, Community Foundation of NCW, and 501 Commons have teamed up to help non-profits apply for emergency assistance and position themselves for other funding through National Economic Development Council.</i></p>	WA Dept, Of Commerce, Washington Government Agencies, Small and Mid-Scale Farm and Food Enterprises

⁶ This action received one stand aside vote. Stand aside votes do not count against consensus. Description of stand aside votes are captured in Appendix D.

F	Develop ombudsman/woman position at the state to coordinate and share information regarding relief resources and services to help individual farmers understand and access the resources available to them. The economic relief, funding, and financing landscape is changing daily and it is hard for technical assistance service providers to keep up with the changes. There are many resources being deployed now through WSDA Regional Markets, WSU Food Systems Program, Farm King County, and others are working to provide comprehensive information on what is available. However, that does not mean it is easy to navigate for farmers, as they have to go to all the individual programs that are available.	Washington Government Agencies, Policymakers
G	Support technical assistance providers (e.g., local CDs, WSU, SCC, WSDA, etc.) using state or federal dollars to work with producers to tackle a variety of issues related to pivoting from one market to another. Farmers need technical assistance to move to wholesale or retail markets. Assistance needs include: food safety regulations; information and guidance on packaging, cooling, post-harvest handling, farm management in terms of production and volume; new and different equipment to cultivate and plant for new markets; and product standardization requirements.	Washington Government Agencies, Policymakers, Local CDs, WSU, SCC, WSDA

Near-Term Actions

Early Action #	Description	Potential Implementors
H ⁷	Ensure Small Business Administration and Small Business Development Center services are available to farming and food microenterprises in Washington.	Small Businesses Administration, small businesses, Port Districts, Economic Development Districts
I	Explore partnering with Workforce Development Councils to seek funding for labor and staff for key agricultural supply chain positions to help build out the needed regional-scale production, processing, and distribution systems needed to make our food system more resilient to the pressures of a crisis such as COVID-19. Explore workforce programs along the lines of FDR era conservation corps that could utilize emergency funding to directly put unemployed workers to work on essential food system building projects.	Workforce Development Councils; Washington Government Agencies

⁷ This action received one stand aside vote. Stand aside votes do not count against consensus. Description of stand aside votes are captured in Appendix D.

Opportunity 2: Offer growers and agricultural enterprises market cultivation assistance, business support services, and technical assistance to serve viable markets.

COVID-19 has created a huge shift in the food system market and there is increased interest in buying local and an increased demand for direct-to-consumer business models. Producers and consumers do not yet have the education and tools to make e-commerce connections. Support the online selling platform needs of producers to take advantage of the growing direct-to-consumer market opportunity (e.g., online food hubs, etc.).

Immediate-Term Actions

Early Action #	Description	Potential Implementors
A	Develop business-to-business needs and assets linkage opportunities to support matchmaking between producers and products, markets, and available processing and logistics infrastructure.	WSDA, CDs, WSU

Near-Term Actions

Early Action #	Description	Potential Implementors
B	Support market cultivation by increasing resources to enable coordination to match growers with markets and products with appropriate available infrastructure. We're used to thinking about how to connect producers to institutional purchasers through easy/larger distribution networks, but that end customer is now thinking about how to bypass distributors to reach institutional markets for example.	WSDA, CDs, WSU
C	Make e-tools and technical assistance available to agricultural enterprises that need to rapidly develop ability to take orders or sell product online. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support and learn from WSDA Regional Market's effort to offer technical assistance services and cost share opportunities for farms to pilot participation in partnership with small business development organizations. • Explore partnership with local technology entrepreneurs and local business development providers to help producers move more sales options online. • Learn from farms currently selling online for pick up at farmers market sites, for example, Rama Farm in Bridgeport. 	WSDA, Small Business Support Organizations, Department of Commerce, Local Technology Companies and Services

D	Support WSU, WSDA and NW Ag Business Center work to offer business technical support.	WSU, WSDA, NW Ag Business Center, policymakers
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Mid-Term Actions

Early Action #	Description	Potential Implementors
E	<p>Share successful changes agriculture and food enterprises have made to new markets during COVID and share insights so that other businesses can learn from their experience. Technical assistance providers, researchers, and community-based organizations can contribute to this with funded capacity.</p> <p><i>Case Example: Learn from LINC Foods which recently shifted to remote drop site pick up once customers place online orders, Puget Sound Food Hub, and a new food hub evolving through Thurston County EDC.</i></p>	WSU, WSDA, CDs, Community-Based Organizations, Initiative for Rural Innovation and Stewardship (IRIS), Policymakers

Opportunity 3: Provide cost-share, small grants, or public-private financing to help farms and food system businesses shoulder the cost of pivoting to serving new markets and meeting increased demand for locally-marketing producers.

Now, more than ever, small and mid-scale farms and food enterprises need business service technical support to weather the multiple effects of COVID, including the pivot to new markets and business models.

Immediate-Term Actions

Early Action #	Description	Potential Implementors
A	<p>Allow for flexibility in the USDA Local Agriculture Market Programs (LAMP) to more quickly and effectively provide support to regional food systems in line with that program's purpose. Relax or remove eligibility and matching fund requirements and expedite review and approval under the Farmers Market Promotion Program, the Local Food Promotion Program, and the Value Added Producer Grant Program. These existing programs are important sources of capital for local food systems and small- mid scale farms and value-added processors. The grants have been very successful at supporting development of local and regional food systems. Expand and make these programs more accessible to build on the successful programs.</p>	WSDA, USDA, Policymakers, Municipalities

Near-Term Actions

Early Action #	Description	Potential Implementors
B	<p>Reduce market access barriers for farms that are pivoting to serve wholesale and institutional markets (including USDA procurement), with assistance meeting market channel requirements for food safety audits. It is not too difficult to integrate on-farm food safety practices, the cost of audits and on-farm infrastructure is prohibitive.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish cost share program for GAP/GHP Audit at the state level using Specialty Crop Block Grant funds or by expanding the current USDA AMS program to Washington (and other states). • Establish a small grants program to make small farm/inspection plant investments. • Support the WSDA Regional Markets Program to resume offering its “Bridging the Gaps” technical assistance activities that help farms learn about food safety standards and prepare for third party GAP/GHP produce safety audits. 	WSDA, USDA, Policymakers

Challenge # 2

COVID-19 public health responses resulted in transformational shifts in the food system requiring systems-level supports and investment to maintain the functional capacity and flexibility of our food system to meet immediate needs and build resiliency for an uncertain future.

Necessary public health measures to slow transmission of COVID-19 – initiated with the closure of restaurants and the food service sector and continuing with pandemic related constrictions on production and processing – have led to massive shifts in the food system. Prior to COVID-19, Americans consumed nearly 40% of their food through food service channels including restaurants, hospitality and tourism, and institutional food service. With those markets closed, these consumer food needs must be met through entirely different supply chains. Various agricultural producers, processors, and food supply chain enterprises at all scales are rapidly pivoting to serve new consumer demands for direct-to-consumer, retail grocery, and emergency food system needs as their traditional markets have been disrupted. Food system vulnerabilities that were cause for concern previously⁸ are now immediate challenges to be solved. These demand shifts and ongoing public health and safety issues have put new pressures on our food system and require supports and investments in our state’s local and regional food system that are beyond the scope and capacity of individual enterprises.

There is a need to support the viability of diverse markets for Washington-grown products, including retail, wholesale, institutional, and emergency food markets by helping to realign highly specialized, and varied supply chains to meet new needs and to build strength and resiliency into our food systems. Consumers are navigating a

⁸ Various existing food system vulnerabilities are outlined in the [Forum’s 2019 Report](#)

new landscape of decisions, opportunities, and barriers. A robust promotional and educational campaign is needed to direct consumers to connect in new ways with available products and new markets for Washington products. Strategic support and investments in regional food system infrastructure will close gaps that are currently hindering available product from reaching consumers who need it. This includes investment in regional, and right-scaled, processing and distribution capacity as well as reinforcement of essential local food services like farmers markets.

Critically, there needs to be a systemic protection of critical resources like agricultural land, which, if lost due to short-term economic disruption, will be extremely difficult to reclaim. Individual enterprises and agriculture as a whole are going to experience losses during this time. Understanding where thresholds of ‘point of no return’ exist and providing supports to avoid reaching those tipping points will be critical to the future functioning and resilience of our food system.

Opportunity 1: Recognize and support farmers markets as essential components of our food and agriculture system that provide public benefit as important access points to healthy foods and are foundational for local food economies.

Farmers markets represent over \$58 million in reported sales (annually) for well over 1,200 small and mid-sized farmers. In addition to direct sales, farmers markets are critical to new farm business development as well as informally providing a variety of support services for farmers. Farmers markets are established marketplaces that offer one-stop shopping from a variety of farms and have well-developed, functioning food access programs including accepting WIC and Senior FMNP, SNAP, and SNAP Market Match, as well as generously donating to neighborhood food banks.

COVID-19 has stressed the farmers market organizations and infrastructure, exposing weaknesses from decades of public underinvestment and a reliance on community-based volunteer organizations or City programs. As essential services, farmers markets are operating with approval from public health as well as local jurisdictions; they have worked hard to create plans, invest in materials needed, and report on outcomes. Farmers market organizations are at risk of not being able to sustain operations with public health requirements due to increased expenses, especially labor and decreased revenue from lost market days, reduced vendor fees, lost sponsorships, and, for city-run markets, lost tax revenue.

Immediate-Term Actions

Early Action #	Description	Potential Implementors
A	Enable farmers markets to expand their sites using public or private land so that social distancing and all other public health directives can be maintained while serving a greater (sustaining) number of farmers and shoppers.	WSFMA, WSDA, Local Government Agencies

B	Provide a public stabilization package to farmers market organizations (to replace lost revenue) so that they can be leveraged for current and additional sales through new/hybrid direct-to-consumer models and preserve market infrastructure and community assets.	WSFMA, Washington Government Agencies, Policymakers
C	Support farmers markets' ability to develop alternative and hybrid models for servicing all customers (e.g., individuals, CSA, institutions, and wholesale), including pre-orders and drive through markets, by helping to secure and fund permits; access existing online platforms, train vendors, and pay staff.	WSFMA, WSDA, Local Government Agencies

Mid-Term Actions

Early Action #	Description	Potential Implementors
D	Permit farmers markets as essential food and agriculture enterprises not temporary events. Farmers markets need secure and affordable sites; as well as support offered to other marketplaces. <i>Case Example: Pybus Foundation in Wenatchee serves as the fiscal agent for the Wenatchee Valley Farmer's Market which has a permanent home at Pybus Public Market.</i>	WSFMA, WSDA, Local Government Agencies

Opportunity 2: Identify opportunities in the immediate, near and mid-term to reorient, improve, and develop food system infrastructure (including processing, storage, aggregation and distribution) for a variety of agricultural enterprises to ensure economic viability during this crisis and beyond.

The public health measures necessary to slow transmission of COVID-19 precipitated a massive shift in demand from serving the food service sector to meeting household needs. Emergency and food access programs are overwhelmed with demand for new types of products, like grocery and retail, and they can struggle to source the product they need. There are immediate needs to support the infrastructure and logistical changes required to ensure households can access foods they need. Meanwhile, many individual farms and food businesses are needing to quickly retool to serve new markets, often lacking the infrastructure at the regional level to make that change possible. Some farms are shifting to direct-to-consumer markets to meet increased demand. This shift necessitates new cold and dry storage, pre-order drop points, value-added processing, and packaging required to meet COVID-19 related health requirements. Some farms may need to shift to serving retail grocery and the new needs of institutional customers (like schools) and emergency food programs (like meal providers and food banks). These farms need more processing infrastructure to meet the desires and specifications of these new markets, remain viable, and be part of a resilient food system beyond the pandemic.

Immediate-Term Actions

Early Action #	Description	Potential Implementors
A	<p>Reorient and reallocate existing chilled transportation infrastructure to ensure adequate transportation capacity. There is existing and available transportation capacity to make deliveries. Explore developing a network of ‘mom and pop’ shops that have cold and dry storage.</p> <p><i>Case Example: NW Harvest is planning to hire a few LINC Foods drivers/trucks for delivery to eastern WA food pantries; Rotary First Harvest is matching excess food with excess trucking. WSU Extension in Stevens County has developed a model that uses small refrigerated trailers to deliver fresh produce to stores and foodbanks in Spokane, Stevens and Pend Oreille counties that could be scaled up.</i></p>	<p>Government Agencies, Private Businesses, WSU, Agricultural Resource Providers, Non-profit Organizations</p>
B	<p>Use existing Washington-based distribution networks (e.g., Amazon, Charlie’s Produce, small and mid-sized food hubs, other smaller distribution networks, etc.) to get Washington-grown products directly to consumers. Reach out to existing networks to understand what capacity there is in the system. Consider conducting a survey of licensed distributors in the state to learn more.</p> <p><i>Case Example: Snohomish County is exploring partnering with Sysco and Charlie’s Produce to get product to customers. Chelan and Douglas County Community Action Council is developing a mobile food pantry that will regularly rotate through remote points of the region to provide fresh local food in coordination with community health, WorkSource, bookmobile, and other services.</i></p>	<p>WSU Extension, WSDA, DOH/local ACHs, Private Businesses, Agricultural Resource Providers, Non-profit Organizations, NW Cooperative Development Center (NWCDC)</p>
C	<p>Reactivate the supply chains to keep lights on in our food businesses like restaurants and institutions (schools, hospitals, etc.). Support restaurants in preparing meals for institutional needs. Provide stimulus dollars to cover the difference between keeping-lights-on costs for restaurants and purchase price.</p> <p><i>Case Example: Center for Good Food Purchasing is developing this idea in Los Angeles. Snohomish County will be implementing something similar as well.</i></p>	<p>Policymakers, Government Agencies, Philanthropy, Private Businesses, Funders (e.g., philanthropic, public, or private investors)</p>

Near-Term Actions

Early Action #	Description	Potential Implementors
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D	<p>Identify storage, warehousing, and processing facilities where large amounts of a commodity can be broken-down to sizes and quantities that can be distributed to homes, food banks, food pantries, and other distribution centers.</p> <p>Grain producers are ramping up production of 5lbs bags of flour from 50lbs bags of flour to meet new demand, but there is not enough storage for shelf stable goods to accommodate new volume. Explore partnership with companies like Charlie’s Produce that have extra and refrigerated storage capacity needed to address constraints schools and food banks/pantries are dealing with.</p>	<p>WSU, WSDA, Private Businesses, Agricultural Resource Providers, Non-profit Organizations. Economic Development Organizations</p>
E	<p>Funding, financing, and cost-sharing: Offer affordable financing to cover expenses of pivot to minimal processing or packaging needs of institutional buyers.</p>	<p>Policymakers, Government Agencies, Private Businesses, Institutions, Funders (e.g., philanthropic, public, or private investors), Craft3</p>

Mid-Term Actions

Early Action #	Description	Potential Implementors
F	<p>Alleviate processing and packaging barriers. Procuring fresh products (from Washington producers) for use in current operating models of emergency food programs like food banks and take-away school meals, will require identifying or developing infrastructure capacity for raw agricultural products to be minimally processed and packaged (e.g., chopped, sliced, diced, flash frozen in single servings and/or household size packages). The shift school meal providers have made from congregate to take-away meals means schools need products in different forms (this is true for food banks too).</p>	<p>WSU, WSDA, Department of Commerce, USDA, Economic Development Association, Private Businesses, Agricultural Resource Providers, Non-profit Organizations.</p>

G	<p>Deputize the WSDA food safety program to work with USDA. There is currently a bottleneck in the livestock processing system due to the shortage of USDA inspectors. Deputizing the WSDA food safety program to work with USDA would bring more slaughter and meat processing plants online to mitigate local supply chain blockages and ensure small scale livestock producers are able to bring their products to local retail and direct-to-consumer markets. Determine if the immediate need is more plants versus more capacity for existing plants. Explore whether federal guidelines can make exemptions for state approved meat packing.</p>	USDA, WSDA, Policymakers
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Opportunity 3: Increase purchases of Washington farm products with better visibility and promotion of Washington products in the marketplace.

Farm directories and e-commerce platforms will only be effective if paired with a robust promotional campaign alerting consumers that they should be looking for such options.

Near-Term Actions

Early Action #	Description	Potential Implementors
A	<p>Support and expand existing statewide directory of farms selling for local purchasing to help consumers find farm products. Support and learn from the experience of the Food Atlas Project (involving several NGO’s with varied directories and WSU). Several unique directories, including the WSU Farm Finder Tool, are being updated now for eventual integration with a statewide Food Atlas. This Atlas would provide farm website listings with an e-commerce component. Currently, it is the farm listing site that points to existing local websites and listings and maintains regional and local identity.</p>	Non-profit Organizations; WSU, WSDA, Funders

Learn From:

- The Washington Young Farmer’s Coalition, Online Sales Platform Overview: <https://www.youngfarmers.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Farmers-Guide-to-Direct-Sales-Software-Platforms.pdf>
- Learn from King County efforts to develop an ESRI app farm finder tool that would list all farms, products available, dates and times of operations, selling opportunities etc. and farm listing efforts in [Clark County](#), [Thurston County](#) and the Tilth Alliance’s Farm Guide: <https://farm-guide.org/>.
- The Farm Bureau’s Farm Fresh: <https://wsfb.com/farm-fresh/> .

Mid-Term Actions

Early Action #	Description	Potential Implementors
B	<p>Develop and implement consumer education, marketing, and promotion campaign to help consumers engage with new e-commerce tools. Earned traditional media and robust social media coverage of the idea of 'buy local through new alternate channels' and where to look will be key. CDs can help with WA-grown messaging that is broad and aimed at more than one producer at a time to help consumers understand where their food comes from and how to support the local community.</p> <p>Use funding and coordination to leverage existing local marketing programs (e.g., Eat Local First's marketing for CSA and direct to consumer models) and related organizations and non-profits to bring marketing efforts statewide.</p> <p><i>Case Examples: There are Eat Local First marketing campaign pilots in Whatcom and Skagit. Sustainable Connections, Tilth Alliance, Pierce County Fresh and Eat Local First Olympic Peninsula are partnering on submitting an LFPP grant to develop a statewide consumer facing Eat Local First web platform and Food Atlas to connect consumers to farms and local food. King County is also developing an online tool to help consumers find local farms to purchase from.</i></p>	CDs, Local Marketing Programs, Non-Profit Organizations, WSDA
C	<p>Develop an e-commerce platform and support agricultural enterprises to participate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a focused subcommittee to identify what is needed from the producer and customer perspective to successfully move to an online platform. Balance public coordination of knowledge sharing with allowing entrepreneurs to take tools and models that are quickly available, launch programs, learn and adapt. • Create position/capacity within WSDA, WSU, or other organizations to coordinate multiple farm businesses moving to an online platform so that it is not each producer having to solve the issue for themselves. 	WSU, WSDA, Government Agencies

Opportunity 4: Implement a set of land protection tools to mitigate potential loss of agricultural land and promote the exchange of agricultural land to new and beginning farmers.

COVID-19 has created unprecedented economic uncertainty and reduced access to markets for agricultural producers across Washington, especially for farms selling at the regional and local level. In the near future, this will have the effect of forcing smaller-scale producers to leverage additional debt, pull acreage out of active production, or even sell to the highest bidder where there is significant development potential. This not only undermines our regional food security and the resilience of our food systems, but puts the important ecological benefits that farmland provides at risk. We need a clear set of land protection tools to address these trends in the

face of COVID-19, and into the future. Washington is well-situated to rise to the challenge with a diverse, coordinated network of farmland preservation partners, including SCC, the Washington Association of Land Trusts, American Farmland Trust, Washington Association of CDs, county government programs, and local land trusts, all prepared to support the following proposed early actions:

Near-Term Actions

Early Action #	Description	Potential Implementors
A ⁹	<p>Provide \$100 million in funding to existing WSCC programs for the purchase of conservation easements or development rights to secure multi-benefit agricultural lands owned by producers most impacted by COVID-19. These tools not only provide direct cash support for producers in need but also reduce land costs for the next generation of farmers while protecting the conservation values of the property in perpetuity. The SCC’s Office of Farmland Preservation has developed the flexible administrative structure, technical expertise, and relationships with conservation practitioners necessary to get significant funding on the ground quickly to support farmers in dire need.</p>	<p>SCC; Non-profits; Land trusts</p>
B ¹⁰	<p>Allocate pass-through funding to the SCC to expand existing land linking programs that connect open agricultural ground with producers looking for additional acreage. The COVID-19 crisis has both increased demand for locally sourced food and amplified economic uncertainty among small farmers, meaning that supporting farmland succession and transfer is more critical than ever. Land linking programs, such as PCC Farmland Trust’s Farm to Farmer program, act as a very cost-efficient way of not only preventing farmland conversion, but of cultivating a more resilient community of producers, all while making the most out of land with existing infrastructure and access to markets. With a proven, successful program structure in place, the Farm to Farmer network is uniquely poised to scale up in the near future to serve a broader geographic area impacted by this crisis.</p>	<p>NGOs Working with Regional and Local Partners</p>
C	<p>Implement a cooperative program between SCC and the Washington State Housing and Finance Commission to provide low interest loan capital for practitioners to buy agricultural ground at high risk of conversion. In periods of economic uncertainty such as caused by COVID-19, agricultural land with significant development potential is more likely to be placed on the open market on short notice. By providing non-profits or other entities the loan funds to secure these important properties, this land can ultimately be protected with a conservation easement before being sold to low-income or new and beginning farmers through alternative financing models. The framework and transactional details of such a revolving loan program have been developed by key stakeholders and are ready for rapid implementation with additional agency collaboration.</p>	<p>SCC; WSHFC; Local and Regional Non-profit Land Trusts</p>

⁹ This action received two stand aside votes. Stand aside votes do not count against consensus. Description of stand aside votes are captured in Appendix D.

¹⁰ This action received one stand aside vote. Stand aside votes do not count against consensus. Description of stand aside votes are captured in Appendix D.

Challenge #3

COVID-19 has increased the need for nutrition services and assistance due to massive unemployment and economic insecurity for Washingtonians.

There are major challenges to serving school meals during COVID-19. Through the USDA School Foods Program, schools and some early learning environments provide meals for children whose families have low incomes. During COVID-19, there has been a shift to a frontline model, and congregate meals are no longer possible. The Washington school meal program is currently serving about a third of the usual volume of meals daily.

There is a need to decentralize food distribution so that meals can be given in community settings where people are, or be distributed by non-traditional partners who are trusted resources in these communities. The stay home order, the travel restrictions, and social distancing requirements needed to contain the spread of COVID-19 have exacerbated existing access barriers to resources like congregate meal programs for seniors, childcare and after school program meals, and even food banks. Populations most impacted include seniors; people with disabilities, and individuals with immune-compromised conditions; children who cannot access meals at school, pre-school, or after school programs; people who rely on public transit, which has reduced routes and passenger capacity; and essential workers who cannot get to food banks due to work hours.

COVID-19 funding requests dedicated exclusively for healthcare miss opportunities to address interrelated food security challenges occurring as a result of the pandemic. More people are facing food insecurity as unemployment rates soar and the ability to feed low income people through schools, early learning, and senior meal programs is compromised. The direct result is an unparalleled demand for emergency food programs in a rapidly changing environment where safe food distribution costs are significantly more than normal operations and require both public and private sector dollars to support. Producers, already hurting under the economic losses from trade disputes, are even more financially hurt with the loss of sales and direct marketing opportunities in the food services sector.

It's critical that we determine how to move surplus produce to people in need without hurting growers economically and meeting food safety desires and regulations. The supply of donated food in the state is significantly reduced (at least 70%) due to COVID-19. There's increased demand for locally sourced food for food bank distribution since federal commodity streams take upwards of three months to arrive in the state. Food shortages have occurred from surging consumer demand and stockpiling, workforce disruptions over health and safety concerns for food industry workers, and safety concerns related to handling of food for donation. Despite recent Congressional action, there are lengthy timelines for the arrival of federal commodities in our state from USDA. At the same time, Washington growers of every scale have lost important markets, including international exports from ongoing trade disputes now aggravated by transportation and demand uncertainty from COVID-19, direct-to-consumer markets such as scaling down of farmers markets, and intermediated sales to restaurants, hospitality businesses, and other institutions (see Challenge 1 above).

However, there is food in the system or in the pipeline for use in Washington that will go unused if not redirected. For example, OSPI has food from USDA in its pipeline sitting in warehouses that OSPI contracts with. Schools were planning to use this food to serve a different type of meal than the bagged meals schools are now serving under COVID-19. There is an opportunity to determine how to use this food for other others. Food in large quantities or other forms may need to be broken down and repackaged. Food can be moved to non-profit meal service providers and food banks who can use large quantities or break them down. For example, right now

millions of pounds of potatoes are available and there is no market; some of these potatoes are being moved through the emergency food distribution network.

Opportunity 1: Ensure expansive and comprehensive nutrition services and assistance reach children, adults, and seniors in need.

Immediate-Term Actions

Early Action #	Description	Potential Implementors
A	State organizations should deliver aligned messaging to educate funders and local and state decision-makers on food security as an integral part of the state’s public health response to COVID-19, with the goal of ensuring resources to address food system challenges related to the pandemic.	Government Agencies; Funders; Policymakers

Near-Term Actions

Early Action #	Description	Potential Implementors
B	Provide sufficient funding to Washington schools and childcare facilities to support new staffing models to effectively support schools and childcare facilities feeding kids in an ongoing manner, especially during the summer. Staffing food services has new challenges. Food service labor contracts and contracting have changed in terms of what people are being asked to do now versus what they signed up to do. Moms with kids in school have been an important source of staff but now these staff have kids out of school and the job is less inviting.	Government Agencies; Policymakers; Funders; Schools and Childcare Facilities
C	Develop a new federal program to address the meal and nutrition program needs of schools and K-12 students during an emergency/pandemic. Existing school meal programs and child care nutrition programs operate under federal guidelines that were not designed for pandemic or emergency situations. This limits the ability of local program implementers to pivot and quickly respond to the meal and nutrition program needs of children. Even with new USDA waivers, operations on the ground are very challenging. Right now, staff are tweaking an existing program for a long-term large-scale pandemic scenario. Tweaking an existing program is time intensive and tricky.	Food Policy Forum Outreach to State Congressional Delegation.

Mid-Term Actions

Early Action #	Description	Potential Implementors
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D	<p>Identify and share examples of how communities are building on existing efforts to coordinate food security response in light of COVID-19 to foster a localized coordinated community response system. Localized community response should focus on maximizing participation and access to public benefits and publicly funded resources like senior home delivered meals, WIC, child nutrition programs, and food banks with the coordination of public and private resources to resolve logistical barriers to utilizing these programs. Work with communities to document what is working, and what is not working and report this to the state’s Food Security Coordination Team.</p>	Community Based Organizations, Advocacy Groups, Government Agencies
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Opportunity 2: Support growers and people in need by: Purchasing food from Washington growers, including small and mid-scale farms.

Immediate-Term Actions

Early Action #	Description	Potential Implementors
A	<p>Support the “Farmers Feeding Families Coronavirus Response Act” introduced in Congress. The bill would provide much needed additional funding to purchase goods from small and medium farmers and producers who are sitting on surplus crops and provide them to food banks and food assistance programs who are facing unprecedented demands. If passed, the bill will direct USDA to allocate a portion of federal commodities purchased for food banks from direct-to-market businesses like food hubs, agriculture cooperatives, and producer associations as well as small and mid-scale producers. The bill also authorizes USDA to give funds directly to state agencies to purchase food for food banks from producers within the state.</p>	Policymakers, USDA
B	<p>Allow the Secretary of Agriculture maximum flexibility to use Stafford Act Section 32 funds and Families First Coronavirus Act Section 101(g) to purchase foods from local producers during Presidentially-declared emergencies and disasters.</p>	Policymakers
C	<p>Request USDA approval of extension of Washington’s disaster household food distribution plan to help move unused food as needed.</p>	USDA, WA Government Agencies
D	<p>Monitor implementation of USDA Coronavirus Farm Assistance Program (CFAP). Depending on availability of resources, this is an opportunity to help food distributors connect with food banks, food hubs, and small and mid-scale producers to design emergency food boxes targeting areas of high need and limited resources and purchase from local producers.</p>	USDA, WA Government Agencies, Producers, Food Distributors, and Markets

E	Allow state agencies to purchase eligible foods in bulk to ensure that farm products do not go to waste and are accessible to all who need food during this emergency.	Policymakers, Government Agencies
F	Ensure public schools have adequate funding and flexibility to purchase needed food products, and to purchase from local farms. Available Washington-grown food might be at a higher price point than institutional buyers can afford. Use federal and state dollars to help make Washington-grown purchases. Allow TEFAP Farm to Food Bank funds (FTFB) to be used for purchase, transport, and storage of commodities from local producers that would have otherwise been sold through direct marketing or institutional procurement that are not operating as a result of COVID-19 social distancing measures.	Policymakers, Government Agencies, Public Schools
G	Maintain or increase capacity of the WSDA Regional Markets Program to facilitate farm to market connections, including to schools, childcares and other food access programs. During a crisis – whether a pandemic, a weather related or other act of nature, or an economic crisis – the state needs to have the ability to respond immediately to food needs. By facilitating connections between farms, small distributors, and schools, Regional Markets helps build and maintain connections in local supply chains. A robust WSDA Regional Markets Program will help the state be prepared for such a response.	Policymakers, WSDA
H	Fund purchases of locally grown food for food pantries across the state as coordinated by Food Lifeline, Northwest Harvest, and Second Harvest.	Food Pantries, Government Agencies; Community Based Organizations

Near-Term Actions

Early Action #	Description	Potential Implementors
I	Pilot “Fresh Emergency Food Boxes.” Support Northwest Harvest (NWH) to work with Washington growers who can supply a variety of locally grown fruit and vegetables to supplement the nonperishable food boxes NWH is building. NWH will share what is learned from the pilot with WSDA and determine needs to scale up for wider implementation.	Northwest Harvest, Washington Growers, WSDA

J	<p>Determine the food safety regulations, marketplace certifications, and related considerations that must be overcome to facilitate producers pivoting to new supply chain infrastructure and assist local producers in overcoming those barriers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relax public procurement requirements for third party produce safety audits within purchasing programs intended to provide relief and market stabilization for local and direct marketing farms. • Establish cost share program for GAP/GHP Audit by expanding existing USDA pilot to include Washington state, or at the state level using Specialty Crop Block Grant funds. • Establish a small grants program to make small farm/plant investments in produce safety. • Fund capacity in the Regional Markets “Bridging the Gaps” technical assistance program that helps small farms to prepare for GAP/GHP audits. 	WSDA, Government Agencies
K	<p>Foster cross-sector promotion of the WA Food Fund which raises money in the private sector to support joint-procurement to help increase awareness and grow potential donors while reinforcing a message that our entire food system is negatively impacted by COVID-19.</p>	WA Food Fund, Private Businesses, Funders

Mid-Term Actions

Early Action #	Description	Potential Implementors
L	<p>Fund the King CD’s King County Farmers Share, a project of Harvest Against Hunger (formerly Rotary First Harvest). The project provides funds to directly contract with King County producers to get local product into the supply chain to local food banks and pantries. This is a replicable model and could further expand the state’s Farm to Food Pantry initiative.</p>	Harvest Against Hunger, King County, Local Food Banks and Pantries, Farm to Food Pantry Initiative
M	<p>Analyze and use results from two forthcoming surveys to determine nature and extent of infrastructure capacity needs and identify potential collaborations to support the infrastructure capacity needs of growers for the WSDA capacity grants. The forthcoming Harvest Against Hunger survey and the food waste capacity assessment will shed light on the specific infrastructure needs from the supply and market side.</p>	WSDA

Opportunity 3: Support growers and people in need by: Helping people use their benefits to buy fresh and local products.

Immediate-Term Actions

Early Action #	Description	Potential Implementors
A	<p>Ensure service organizations and people are aware of the flexibilities being created by USDA and others to access benefits like SNAP, school meals, etc. and relief programs. This would help take pressure of the food bank system. Ensure the state is taking advantage of available federal programs.</p> <p><i>Case Example: Community Foundation NCW provided a grant to the Wenatchee Valley Farmer's Market to enable the market to increase the SNAP match benefits to 50% as an incentive to encourage people to buy local food.</i></p>	DOH, NGOs and Partner Organizations
B	<p>Request Congress to grant USDA the authority to reduce or remove 100% matching fund requirements and expedite review and approval under the federal Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentives Program (GusNIP) grant. Grant applications opened for GusNIP's FY2020 cycle on March 13 and proposals were due May 18, with \$41.5 million in awards available. DOH applied for this grant as part of the state's Fruit and Vegetable Incentives Program. Foundations and community benefit organizations that would be sources of match are focusing funds on COVID-19 related items or are unable to commit funding because of financial uncertainty, making it difficult to fundraise. An expedited review process would allow DOH, if awarded a grant, to begin expansion to more grocery stores in fall 2020 and provide more fruit and vegetable incentives to SNAP clients.</p>	Policymakers, USDA, DOH, Foundations and Community Benefit Organizations

Near-Term Actions

Early Action #	Description	Potential Implementors
C	<p>Allow for flexibility in WIC and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Programs (FMNP) and SNAP and SNAP Market Match to continue to function as farmers markets change operation models under public health directive. For example, allow WIC checks to be mailed instead of picked up at the farmers markets; and allow at-risk individuals (i.e., seniors) to send a representative shopper to the market.</p>	WIC and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program, SNAP and SNAP Market Match, Government Agencies, Policymakers

D	Support and enhance outreach to low-income families/seniors participating in FMNP and SNAP so that they know how to use benefits, including the SNAP Market Match, to buy directly from WA growers (including updated farmers market schedules and operations). Outreach includes DSHS SNAP Ed work and work by DOH Regional FINI TAs and WSFMA Regional Leads. Note: due to COVID19, outreach and nutrition education has had to adapt (go online) due to public health directives.	FMNP, SNAP, DOH, WSFMA
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Mid-Term Actions

Early Action #	Description	Potential Implementors
E	Identify immediate changes needed to infrastructure, licensing, and regulation to support farmers in selling to SNAP EBT customers. Significant changes to the economic security of Washingtonians is increasing the number of people who are eligible for SNAP. Under current federal rules, the “retailer” needs to be certified by USDA to accept SNAP benefits. There are some guidelines that must be met in terms of what they sell.	SNAP; DOH
F	Support USDA policy and technological changes to allow SNAP to be used in online purchases in direct marketing models (i.e., pre-order and pick-up at farmers markets, delivery, CSA, food hub, or bulk purchase models in partnership with emergency food programs). Currently, EBT cards cannot be used to pay online other than with Amazon/Wal-Mart who are part of a pilot project under USDA. Some certified SNAP retailers such as grocery stores have increased capacity to accept SNAP purchases by having portable point of sale card readers available at curbside pick-up or in-person delivery to complete the sales transaction for an online order.	USDA: SNAP
G	Promote pandemic EBT (P-EBT) (authorized under Families First Coronavirus Response Act of 2020) and learn from the current experience with the system to ensure that more expansive benefits delivery is possible in the future.	USDA, Policymakers

Challenge #4

COVID-19 underscores the need to foster resilience in the face of a changing climate to ensure long-term food security.

Some actions related to providing long-term support to farmers that also address the impacts of climate change have been sidelined to rapidly changing COVID-19 response needs. However, we can provide immediate financial assistance to farmers to promote resilience in the face of a changing climate and ensure long-term food security, as the effects of COVID-19 will continue to have impacts for the foreseeable future.

Opportunity 1: Support implementation programs and resources that provide immediate financial assistance to farmers to promote resilience in the face of a changing climate and ensure long-term food security.

Near-Term Actions

Early Action #	Description	Potential Implementors
A	<p>Support conservation programs and resources that provide direct financial assistance to farmers to implement best management practices that address impacts of climate change and also provide employment opportunities and economic development. Programs such as the Sustainable Farm and Fields and Soil Health Initiative have the potential to be examined for this purpose. Provide funds and technical assistance for farmers to implement cover crops, no till, organic amendments, etc. This allows farmers to have funding – not tied to loans – that directly supports farm viability and production, and addresses conservation and climate change goals.</p>	<p>Conservation Commission, CDs, NRCS, Local Agriculture Commissions, Legislature, WSU</p>
B	<p>Washington agencies and organizations should continue preparations for near-term and long-term planning and implementation of programs related to the climate change recommendations outlined by the Impacts of Climate Change Team in the <u>June 2019 report to the Legislature</u>. Continue to promote PDR programs; develop a comprehensive state-wide water availability strategy; create and deploy a voluntary carbon credit program; and develop strategies to enhance adaptation for food and agricultural productions that are most likely to be impacted by climate change.</p>	<p>Washington Agencies and Organizations</p>

Appendix A - Forum Membership

The budget proviso provided the following guidance on the composition of the Forum:

- a. In making appointments, the director of the commission must attempt to ensure a diversity of knowledge, experience, and perspectives by building on the representation established by the food system roundtable initiated by Executive Order 10-02.
- b. In addition to members appointed by the director of the SCC, four legislators may serve on the food policy forum in an ex officio capacity. Legislative participants must be appointed as follows:
 - i. The speaker of the house of representatives shall appoint one member from each of the two largest caucuses of the house of representatives; and
 - ii. The president of the senate shall appoint one member from each of the two largest caucuses of the senate

*Indicates Food Policy Forum leadership

+Indicates member participated in the June 25 consensus vote on early actions or assigned a delegate to vote on their behalf.

x Indicates member participated in part of the June 25 meeting but did not vote (e.g., had to leave meeting before vote took place)

First Name	Last Name	Affiliation
Aaron	Czyzewski+	Food Lifeline
Addie	Candib+	American Farmland Trust
Amy	Ellings+	WA State DOH
Amy	Moreno Sills+	PCC Farmland Trust
Aslan	Meade	Thurston Economic Development Council
Babette	Roberts+	WA State Department of Social and Health Services
Brian	Estes+	LINC Foods
Carol	Smith*+	WSCC
Chad	Kruger+	Washington State University - CSANR
Chris	Voigt	WA State Potato Commission
Chris	Elder+	Whatcom County Public Works
Christina	Wong+	Northwest Harvest
Claire	Lane+	WA State Anti-Hunger and Nutrition Coalition
Colleen	Donovan+	WA State Farmers Market Association
Dan	Wood	WA State Dairy Federation

Dean	Takko ^x	Senator
Derek	Sandison ^{*+}	WA Dept. of Agriculture
Diana	Carlen	WA Association of Wheat Growers
Diane	Dempster ⁺	Clark County Food System Council
Elizabeth	Bragg	WA State Young Farmers Coalition
Jon	DeVaney ⁺	WA Tree Fruit Association
Kate	Delavan ^{*+}	WSCC
Laura	Lewis ⁺	WSU - Food Systems Program
Laura	Raymond ^{*+}	WSDA
Leanne	Eko ⁺	Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Linda	Neunzig	Snohomish County
Mark	Fountain	Food Northwest
Mary	Embleton ^x	King CD
Mary	Dye ⁺	Representative
Melissa	Spear ⁺	Tilth Alliance
Mia	Gregerson ^x	Representative
Nancy	Warnert ⁺	Initiative for Rural Innovation and Stewardship
Nick	Norton ⁺	Washington Association of Land Trusts
Patrick "PJ"	Cawley	Charlie's Produce
Richard	Conlin ⁺	Puget Sound Regional Council
Ron	Shultz ^{*+}	WSCC
Tim	Crosby ⁺	Cascadia Foodshed Financing Project
Tom	Davis ⁺	WA State Farm Bureau
Tom	Salzer	WA Association of CDs
Trish	Twomey ⁺	WA Food Coalition

Appendix B - Implementation Team Rosters

The Implementation Teams met from March to June 2020 to identify and discuss early implementation actions for its 2019 consensus recommendations and has refined actions in light of COVID-19 needs and responses.

Team 1: Food Insecurity

First Name	Last Name	Affiliation
Aaron	Czyzewski	Food Lifeline
Amy	Ellings	WA State DOH
Babette	Roberts	WA State Department of Social and Health Services
Christina	Wong	Northwest Harvest
Dante	Pollard	Community Member, Member of the Steering Committee for the Governor's Poverty Reduction Workgroup
Leanne	Eko	Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Trish	Twomey	WA Food Coalition

Team 2: Agricultural Land Protection and Availability and Next Generation Farming

First Name	Last Name	Affiliation
Addie	Candib	American Farmland Trust
Amy	Moreno Sills	PCC Farmland Trust
Chris	Elder	Whatcom County
Elizabeth	Bragg	WA State Young Farmers Coalition
Nick	Norton	Washington Association of Land Trusts
Ron	Shultz	WSCC
Tom	Salzer	WA Association of CDs

Team 3: Alleviating Barriers to Small and Mid-Scale Producers Accessing Markets, Including Institutional Markets

First Name	Last Name	Affiliation
Amy	Moreno Sills	PCC Farmland Trust
Claire	Lane	WA State Anti-Hunger and Nutrition Coalition

Colleen	Donovan	WA State Farmers Market Association
Diane	Dempster	Clark County Food System Council
Jon	DeVaney	WA Tree Fruit Association
Laura	Lewis	WSU - Food Systems Program
Laura	Raymond	WSDA
Mary	Embleton	King CD

Team 4: Infrastructure and Rural Economic Development

First Name	Last Name	Affiliation
Aslan	Meade	Thurston Economic Development Council
Brian	Estes	LINC Foods
Linda	Neunzig	Snohomish County
Mark	Fountain	Food Northwest
Mary	Dye	Representative
Melissa	Spear	Tilth Alliance
Nancy	Warner	Initiative for Rural Innovation and Stewardship
Patrick "PJ"	Cawley	Charlie's Produce
Tim	Crosby	Cascadia Foodshed Financing Project

Team 5: Impacts of Climate Change

First Name	Last Name	Affiliation
Chad	Kruger	Washington State University - CSANR
Chris	Voigt	WA State Potato Commission
Chris	Elder	Whatcom County Public Works
Dan	Wood	WA State Dairy Federation
Diana	Carlen	WA Association of Wheat Growers
Richard	Conlin	Puget Sound Regional Council
Tom	Davis	WA State Farm Bureau

Appendix C – Process for Developing Implementation Actions

The Forum worked from March to June 2020 to identify early implementation actions for its [2019 consensus recommendations](#) in light of COVID-19. The Forum engaged in the following process in 2020 to define early actions related to COVID-19¹¹:

Month	Meeting	Objectives
April	Implementation Team ¹² calls	Implementation Teams developed draft actions related to COVID-19.
	Full Forum membership meeting on April 10	Implementation Teams presented draft thinking on actions related to COVID-19 and the Forum shared input and suggested revisions.
May	Implementation Team calls	Implementation Teams incorporated revisions based on the April 10 Forum meeting finalized draft actions related to COVID-19 to be shared with Forum for review.
June	Full Forum membership meeting on June 25	<p>Consensus vote on actions related to COVID-19. The June 25 included the following approach to determine consensus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definition of consensus is “I can live with it.” Full consensus is 100% support. • Actions that did not receive 100% support but garnered more than two-thirds support are added in the appendix as promising ideas. • Members could choose to ‘stand aside’ if they felt they did not understand the opportunity sufficiently to weigh in.

¹¹ The Forum held a series of in-person Forum meetings and Implementation Team calls between November 2019 and March 2020 that were focused on developing implementation actions based on the Forum’s June 2019 recommendations. These draft implementation actions were modified, refined, and expanded upon between April and June 2020 to address food system challenges in light of COVID-19.

¹² To efficiently organize itself to discuss and reflect on food system issues, the Forum broke into five Implementation Teams based on the five topical areas of its [2019 process and Recommendations Report](#). Team topics include: Food Insecurity, Agricultural land protection and availability and next generation farming, Alleviating barriers to small and medium scale farmers accessing markets, including institutional purchasing, Infrastructure and rural economic development, and Impacts of Climate Change. Implementation Team Rosters are in Appendix B.

Appendix D – Voting Stand Asides

The following table depicts the Forum actions in which some members chose to ‘stand aside’ for voting. A ‘stand aside’ does not count against consensus.

Action Number	Action Description	Stand Asides and Rationale
1.1.C	<p>Stabilize lines of credit, extend collateral positions, and create a guarantee fund to allow lines of credit from banks or credit unions. Consider work and activity by NW Farm Credit Services, CDFIs like Craft3 and Business Impact Northwest, and look to Department of Commerce and Office of Financial Management.</p>	<p>Christina Wong, Northwest Harvest <i>Rationale:</i> It is unclear if growers of color would be able to access these traditional lines of credit. Considering how the CARES Act Pay Check Protection forgivable loans unfolded (minority owned businesses were largely shut out of that program, with much of the problem being that they did not have established relationships with traditional SBA lending associations), there is concern that a similar situation could happen for growers of color if this action were implemented.</p>
1.1.H	<p>Ensure Small Business Administration and Small Business Development Center services are available to farming and food microenterprises in Washington</p>	<p>Christina Wong, Northwest Harvest <i>Rationale:</i> It is unclear if growers of color would be able to access these traditional lines of credit. Considering how the CARES Act Pay Check Protection forgivable loans unfolded (minority owned businesses were largely shut out of that program, with much of the problem being that they did not have established relationships with traditional SBA lending associations), there is concern that a similar situation could happen for growers of color if this action were implemented.</p>

2.4.A	<p>Provide \$100 million in funding to existing WSCC programs for the purchase of conservation easements or development rights to secure multi-benefit agricultural lands owned by producers most impacted by COVID-19. These tools not only provide direct cash support for producers in need but also reduce land costs for the next generation of farmers while protecting the conservation values of the property in perpetuity. The SCC’s Office of Farmland Preservation has developed the flexible administrative structure, technical expertise, and relationships with conservation practitioners necessary to get significant funding on the ground to support farmers in dire need.</p>	<p>Mary Dye, Representative <i>Rationale:</i> Viable land production takes a level of commitment that only happens when a person has faced the inherent risk by investing fully through personal ownership. Land Trusts constrain the value of land and limit opportunity for individuals in the free marketplace.</p> <p>It is preferable to invest in infrastructure that improves productivity; makes it easier for farmers on land to make a viable living; improves long-term profitability; and increases the value of land over time.</p> <p>Tom Davis, Washington State Farm Bureau <i>Rationale:</i> WSFB policy supports the use of shorter-duration easements and opposes publicly funded permanent easements. Since this action involves permanent easements using public funding, WSFB has concerns about this action.</p>
2.4.B	<p>Allocate pass-through funding to the SCC to expand existing land linking programs that connect open agricultural ground with producers looking for additional acreage. The COVID-19 crisis has both increased demand for locally sourced food and amplified economic uncertainty among small farmers, meaning that supporting farmland succession and transfer is more critical than ever. Land linking programs, such as PCC Farmland Trust’s Farm to Farmer program, act as a very cost-efficient way of not only preventing farmland conversion, but of cultivating a more resilient community of producers, all while making the most out of land with existing infrastructure and access to markets. With a proven, successful program structure in place, the Farm to Farmer network is uniquely poised to scale up in the near future to serve a broader geographic area impacted by this crisis.</p>	<p>Mary Dye, Representative <i>Rationale:</i> Viable land production takes a level of commitment that only happens when a person has faced the inherent risk by investing fully through personal ownership. Land Trusts constrain the value of land and limit opportunity for individuals in the free marketplace.</p> <p>It is preferable to invest in infrastructure that improves productivity; makes it easier for farmers on land to make a viable living; improves long-term profitability; and increases the value of land over time.</p>