

Farm and Food Strategy Discussion Summary

June 3, 2020 @ 5 PM ET

Dear Allies in Food and Farm Advocacy,

Thank you for joining the collaborative strategy discussion last week. As noted by Maria Moreira of World Farmers, this was an historical moment with multiple partners in the food system uniting. Those gathered discussed the exclusion from policies and programs for farmers and ranchers, farmworkers, and rural and tribal communities. The group determined next-step actions such as collective strategies on data collection, creating and circulating an organization and dear colleague letters, and submitting comments on the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program.

Summary of Food and Farm Strategy Discussion with Allies

Goals ~ Our stated focus is to develop a common understanding of this context including the immediate challenges and inequities affecting rural communities and all who work in the food system, and to collaboratively construct a united and holistic approach to these interconnected challenges that both addresses immediate needs *and* strengthens the foundation for a more just and sustainable food system in the future.

The Context and Framing the Discussion

Rural Coalition Chairperson John Zippert opened the conversation by highlighting three **critical interconnected current issues: the disproportionate suffering from the coronavirus pandemic, a collapsing economy, and the compelling and urgent need for reformation in the criminal justice system.** Democracy challenges and climate change are intertwined within these issues.

Jose Oliva of HEAL Food Alliance echoed this analysis and noted the waves of workers affected by the **pandemic in the food systems: restaurant workers, then meat and processing workers, and now farmworkers** who have also experienced lack of support from previous programs such as the Paycheck Protection Program and Economic Injury Disaster Loans and lack of enforcement of CDC guidelines. The economic and state sponsored systems of oppression and racial capitalism led to the inaccessibility of resources for farmers and structural inequalities in the food system. To rebuild equitable rural communities and food systems, we must advance the urgent issues and the democratic process through our elected leaders in a holistic manner.

Mily Trevino-Sauceda, Board Member of the Rural Coalition as well as Executive Director of Alianza de Campesinas, described the urgency of addressing the ongoing oppression, racism, and exploitation of farmworkers. Workers are threatened or fired because of their immigrant

status, are falling ill and some dying during California's strongest season, have healthcare disparities, and still experiencing harassment and rape. Many families lack internet access, computers, or the knowledge to use them. The health crisis is exacerbated by sanitation inadequacy in the field and infrastructure with no clean restrooms or water access. Social distancing is not enforced (workers usually in close proximity of two to three feet from each other) nor are farmworkers receiving protection enforcement.

Discussion of Current Legislation

NSAC Policy Director, Dr. Eric Deeble initiated a comprehensive overview of the current climate for action on the hill, followed by many others offering input. Together we developed a list (shared at the end of this document) that includes descriptions of many of the bills we discussed. Legislatively, we concluded that most current bills are disconnected from the food system, market losses, farms and processing protection and safety measures, and equity in agricultural policy.

The three trillion dollar **HEROES Act** is currently at a standstill within the Senate after it was passed by the House. Jose Oliva noted that Food Chain Workers are in strong support, because the act includes important protections for workers and immigrants (as detailed in our summary of bills). The Senate may not move forward until after the July recess as it does not appear Senator McConell is interested in taking up the bill. The legislation excluded important components for our farmers, farmworkers, and food system.

NSAC also provided an overview of the newly introduced legislation by Senator Stabenow and Senate Ag Democrats, the **Food Supply Protection Act**, with a cost around \$8 billion. This bill has garnered support and may provide funding for some communities like the tribal community, but farmers and ranchers are still weighed down with debt. The group agreed that a better food system requires debt forgiveness and a larger focus on the **Relief for Small Farmers Act**, which has received little traction and bipartisan support because of the \$9.2 billion price tag. The House did not address the credit issues in the HEROES Act. There is some effort to encourage the Senate for incorporation.

The group concluded that current programs are not meeting the needs, despite their cost. Current coronavirus assistance programs such as the Economic Injury Disaster Loans and Paycheck Protection Programs are not meeting the needs of our communities and have barriers to participation for our farmers. The AMS Farmers to Families Food Box program has to be structurally improved if it is going to be extended. We are all monitoring the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) closely to see who is going to benefit from it, large scale producers or family-size farmers. By highlighting the fallacies in and exclusion from current programs, we can strengthen our current argument to legislators.

Strategies Moving Forward

From the conversation, three major questions prompted the strategic actions moving forward. “How do we come together and address issues of the vulnerable population in food systems. How do we address the issue that the current program is not working? How do we show we're all working together and show the hill that we are collaborating and representing the entire country?”

The group noted several strategic action items:

1. Create and circulate an organizational sign on letter addressing the needs of our communities and the food system in a holistic manner inclusive of all who work in the food system,
2. Work on the hill to develop a similar Dear Colleague letter to Congressional leaders
3. Work Individually and/or together to submit comments addressing excluded commodities, as well as structural concerns in the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program.
4. Consider cooperatively collecting data on farmers and ranchers' experiences with current programs
5. Sharing and encouraging sign ons and support from allies for critical related legislation related to justice in policing, climate change, fair elections and others policies that address the context in which we seek justice for the food system.

Survey ~ The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition is collecting data on farmers, ranchers and other growers feedback on CFAP, PPP, EIDL and USDA loan servicing here and can be found [HERE](#). Farm Aid collects data regularly about callers to their Farm Crisis Hotline. The Rural Coalition is also creating a survey to understand how current assistance programs are and are not meeting the needs of farmers and ranchers. Through shared data collection and question framing, we can specifically identify what are the problems of our farmers.

Collaborative Food System Letter ~ The group will create and circulate an organizational sign on letter to address the exclusion from current programs and identify needs of our communities during the pandemic. The comprehensive letter can include more than what we're currently asking for to provide a larger narrative moving forward in transforming the food system. Marc Grignon offered to provide a short and crisp first draft. John Zippert, Jose Oliva, Jessy Gill, María De Luna, and Ben Lilliston agreed to provide input on the draft.

Food System Dear Colleague Letter/s ~ The need to strategically identify a champion to circulate a related Dear Colleague was emphasized and will follow the first letter.

Coronavirus Food Assistance Program Comments ~ NSAC is submitting comments on existing programs to address structural concerns and RC will submit comments on essential commodities excluded from the program such as nursery and goats. Sarah Hackney from NSAC

shared guidance on how to submit comments to the USDA for additional commodities in CFAP. [Click here to view the document.](#)

We further discussed related issues including next steps for the Gillibrand Credit bill and the additional credit proposals from RC, IAC and others where work continues. The Rural Coalition and NSAC also shared links to their guides on accessing CFAP. Click [here to view the RC Guide to CFAP](#) and [here to view the NSAC Guide.](#)

**We urge you to join us for our next strategy discussion on
Wednesday, June 17 at 5 PM ET (4 PM CT, 3 PM MT, 2 PM PT)**

Current Legislation Overview

New Since Call - Justice in Policing Act ([H.R. 7120](#)) The House has introduced and held a hearing on the Justice in Policing Act with a mark-up scheduled for Wednesday, June 17th. Rural Coalition will by Monday morning circulate proposed comments to the House Judiciary Committee for sign on by our allies. We will submit them by Tuesday evening in advance of the mark-up, but will keep accepting sign-ons to submit as a final document before the hearing record from last week closes late next week.

The Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions Act, HEROES Act ([H.R. 6800](#))

Sponsored by Representative Nita Lowey, this pending omnibus coronavirus relief package has passed the House of Representatives, but has not moved forward in the Senate. It would provide support and funding for essential workers, immigrant families, equitable healthcare, and agricultural producers, among other things.

The HEROES ACT includes most of the language in the following two bills, which Rural Coalition and Alianza Campesinas, among others, have supported:

The COVID-19 Every Worker Protection Act of 2020 ([H.R. 6559](#))

Sponsored by Rep. Bobby Scott (D-VA), this bill would require the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to issue an Emergency Temporary Standard that establishes a legal obligation for all workplaces to implement comprehensive infectious disease exposure control plans to keep workers safe during the coronavirus pandemic.

The Coronavirus Immigrant Families Protection Act ([H.R. 6437](#))

Sponsored by Reps. Judy Chu, Raul Grijalva and Lou Correa, this bill would fill critical gaps in the previous Coronavirus response legislative packages that unjustly excluded immigrant families. Senators Mazie Hirono and Kamala Harris are promoting a similar bill on the Senate side.

See also UFCW, WORC et al. statement: <http://www.ufcw.org/2020/05/28/covid/>

The Food Supply Protection Act ([S.3840](#))

Sponsored by Senator Debbie Stabenow, with support from most Democratic members of the Senate Agriculture committee, this bill would protect the continuity of the food supply chain by providing infrastructure grants for food banks and non-profits, supporting partnerships with entities left out of the UDA food box program, and protecting farm and food processing workers.

Relief for America's Small Farmers Act ([H.R. 6683/S 3602](#))

Sponsored by Senator Kirsten Gillibrand and Representative Sean Patrick Maloney, this bill would target \$9.2 billion in immediate direct relief to small farmers with a one-time debt forgiveness of up to \$250,000.

Farmers Feeding Families - Coronavirus Response Act ([H.R. 6721/ S.3655](#))

Sponsored by Representatives Kim Schrier (D-WA); Cathy McMorris Rogers (R-WA), and Chellie Pingree (D-ME); Senator Bob Casey (D-PA), this bill will bolster the ability of food banks and food assistance programs to meet the needs of growing numbers of food insecure, while also providing much needed additional funding for purchases from small and medium farmers, by providing funds directly to States and state agencies and their food-bank partners. Includes funding set-asides to ensure targeted purchases of food from producers who rely on local agricultural food marketing—such as farmers' markets, farm-to-table restaurants and farm-to-school programs.

Food Assistance for Kids and Families During COVID-19 Act of 2020 ([H.R 6445 / S. 3563](#)) -

Sponsored by Representative Jahana Hayes (D-CT) and Senator Bob Casey (D-PA), this bill would authorize public-private partnerships between the USDA, authorized retailers and community based organizations to support food delivery to SNAP users and provide funding to support grocery delivery for program participants who are seniors, immunocompromised individuals and others unable to travel safely to a retail food outlet such as a grocery store or farmers market.

Processing Revival and Intrastate Meat Exemption Act, PRIME Act ([H.R. 2859/S. 1620](#))

Sponsored by Senator Angus King, Jr. and Representative Thomas Massie, this bill expands the exemption of custom slaughtering of animals from federal inspection requirements, restoring accessibility for small farmers and opening the market for competition of smaller slaughter facilities. *(We have heard support of an urgent need for legislation like this, recognizing the particular approach in this bill may have drawbacks or need refinement.)*

New Markets for State Inspection Meat and Poultry Act ([S.2814](#))

Sponsored by Senator Rounds (R-SD), this bill would allow meat and poultry products inspected by Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) approved state Meat and Poultry Inspection (MPI) programs to be sold across state lines. Currently, there are 27 states with inspection programs "at least equal to" federal meat and/or poultry inspection programs.

Inspector Overtime Relief for Small Plants ([S.3797](#)/ [H.R.6977](#))

Sponsored by Senator Moran (R-KS), this bill would reduce fees for small and very small plants for 18 months. Right now, USDA pays for the required food safety inspectors for all federally inspected plants. For all hours over 40 hours per week, the small plants must pay USDA overtime fees at over \$80 an hour. Some small plants who operate on thin margins cannot afford these fees. USDA would use the funds appropriated to help pay some of the full overtime fee to inspectors.

SNAP Online Expansion and Delivery (Not Yet Introduced)

Sponsored by Senator Durbin (D-IL), this bill would expand SNAP online nationally while also providing information technology investments and technical assistance resources to create the necessary infrastructure to expand online SNAP to all authorized retailers including direct market farmers. This bill would also provide resources to support SNAP delivery and equipping authorized retailers with point of sale devices to support SNAP sales and delivery.