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Secretary of Agriculture Outlines Steps Taken to Secure Food Supply, Address Food Insecurity in Pennsylvania

Harrisburg, PA – Today, Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding outlined progress made in Pennsylvania to secure the stability of the food supply, increase market opportunities, protect the workforce, and ensure food is plentiful and accessible for all Pennsylvanians as the commonwealth works to mitigate against COVID-19.

“From the day COVID-19 knocked on Pennsylvania’s door, Governor Wolf declared agriculture and the entire food supply chain in Pennsylvania as essential and life sustaining; because it is,” said Secretary Redding. “These uncertain times have highlighted the complexity of our nation’s food supply chain and required a new way of thinking; we’ve been actively triaging unprecedented situations as they arrive and working around the clock and across agencies to guide the industry and ensure food remains available and accessible.”

As a result of agriculture being life-sustaining, the department has encouraged food production and processing operations to continue, but has advised they adhere to the following guidance to minimize risk, maintain a healthy workforce, and ensure the safety of food:

- **[Farms and On-Farm Deliveries](#)**: Includes recommendations for limited exposure such as identifying drop off locations for regular deliveries, logging deliveries and on-farm entries, protecting the workforce, maintaining regular cleaning and sanitation, and writing a continuity of business plan to prepare if the farm operator becomes ill or needs to be isolated, so that farm operations can continue.
- **[Farmers Markets and On-Farm Markets](#)**: This guidance includes recommendations for delivery and pick-up, methods for contactless shopping experiences, and decreasing crowds. It outlines the opportunity for farms to open an on-farm stand to sell raw produce, eggs, or shelf stable packaged foods such as jams, jellies, or baked good.
- **[Guidance for Food Processing Facilities](#)**: The Department of Agriculture, Department of Health, and PEMA guided Pennsylvania’s food processing facilities through recommendations to ensure their workforce remains healthy, reduce outbreaks, and maintain continuity of operations. The guidance included separate recommendations for facilities in areas with widespread transmission and limited transmission, as well as steps facilities should immediately implement to screen employees and reduce risk.
- **[Grocery and Convenience Stores](#)**: The department has worked with the Pennsylvania Food Merchants Association and directly with stakeholders to communicate with

operators of grocery stores and other retail food facilities the importance of adherence to the department's guidance and Secretary Levine's [worker safety order](#). The guidance includes both mandatory and recommended customer protective controls, employee protective controls, facility sanitation procedures, and advice to managers.

- **[Procedures for Sanitization and Diagnosed Employees:](#)** This includes both mandatory and recommended guidance to employers to protect employees and customers from COVID-19. Once an employee is diagnosed, it's critical to follow this guidance and the [worker safety order](#) to prevent further spread to other individuals. There is no evidence of COVID-19 being spread through food or food packaging.
- **[DCED Business to Business Portal for PPE:](#)** Communicated to industry the Department of Community and Economic Portal to connect Pennsylvania businesses seeking PPE and related items with resources.

In addition, in acknowledgement of food and agriculture being life-sustaining, greenhouses and nurseries are permitted to operate to provide food plants and seeds to the industry and consumers. While garden centers are not permitted to maintain in-person operations, they're allowed to remain operational through online sales and delivery. All of these businesses should follow the provided guidance.

In addition to providing guidance to the industry to keep the food supply chain moving and maintain a healthy workforce, the Department has acknowledged the need for new market opportunities as others collapsed. With many restaurants shuttered or only offering pick up services and empty schools, many agriculture producers have found themselves without a market for their wholesale products. Below are some opportunities that have been provided to alleviate that stress:

- FDA has released interim guidance allowing the waiver of specific packaging and labeling requirements, this guidance is recognized and accepted in the commonwealth;
- Restaurants are permitted to package meal kits or sell other food ingredients direct to consumers;
- Made eggs available to consumers in food-service sized packaging;
- Advocated for and secured a federal waiver allowing school feeding programs to offer half gallons of milk.

COVID-19 has caused severe economic stress for many Pennsylvanians, and as a result our food banks and their local community partners have been working in overdrive to meet the unprecedented demand. In acknowledgement of the stress on Pennsylvanians and our charitable food system, the Wolf Administration has:

- Applied for and implemented the Disaster Household Distribution Program which allows the department to provide critical food and supplies to Pennsylvanians in need. Advocated for and received a waiver to provide this food without verification of income, which protects food bank employees, volunteers, and Pennsylvanians in need from unnecessary contact;
- Moved quickly to distribute \$3.75 million of worth of TEFAP administrative funding, received through the Families First Coronavirus Act, to 18 food banks serving 67 counties;

- The department is working to acquire and distribute \$11.15 million in USDA Foods – including meats, vegetables, canned goods, cereal, rice, pasta, eggs and more – to the state’s food banks to distribute through their network of distribution sites;
- Through an emergency contract with PEMA, the department provided Hunger-Free Pennsylvania and their network of members \$1 million in emergency funding for food and supplies from the department’s own operating budget;
- Through the State Food Purchase Program, every county received a prorated share of \$500,000 in an early payment that is not typically distributed until June;
- In addition, the department is allowing State Food Purchase Program agencies to use up to 15% of their funds to cover administrative costs (distribution, transportation, packing), usually an 8% limit.
- Submitted state plan and are awaiting approval and final allocation of state funds for the USDA’s Farm to Food Bank, a new program created in the 2018 U.S. Farm Bill. This federal program was based on the Commonwealth’s model of the Pennsylvania Agricultural Surplus System (PASS) program and will allow state dollars to be further leveraged to purchase more PA agricultural products for distribution in the charitable food system.

“We are not willing to accept hunger as our next pandemic and will continue working to develop guidance and advocate for the industry,” added Redding. “They’re working hard, despite the uncertainty, to continue feeding Pennsylvania. I am eternally grateful for this industry and their life-sustaining work.”

The department has provided [guidance to food assistance agencies](#) to continue distributing food to those in need and protect both volunteers and clients from COVID-19. Pennsylvanians who have found themselves food insecure as a result of COVID-19 are eligible for state and federal [food assistance](#).

For a complete list of guidance documents and information as it relates to agriculture during COVID-19 mitigation in Pennsylvania visit agriculture.pa.gov/COVID. For the most accurate, timely information related to Health in Pennsylvania, visit on.pa.gov/coronavirus.