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Wolf Administration Advocates for Senior Feeding Program Flexibilities, Congressional Action Needed to Protect Vulnerable Populations

Harrisburg, PA – Department of Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding and Department of Aging Secretary Robert Torres today penned a [letter](#) to Pennsylvania’s congressional delegation urging legislative action to enable Pennsylvania’s older adults to access the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program during the mitigation effort.

“Last year, this program provided more than 160,000 seniors in the commonwealth with fresh, local food and simultaneously supported more than 2,000 members of our vital agriculture industry,” said Secretary Redding. “These changes are critical to ensuring our most vulnerable Pennsylvanians continue to have access to nutritious food during these uncertain times, and don’t put themselves at risk for contracting the potentially fatal COVID-19 virus as a result of needing to verify eligibility in person.”

Typically, the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition program application and eligibility verification is completed at a senior center or at one of Pennsylvania’s 52 Area Agencies on Aging. Distribution of the vouchers also takes place at these locations. However, since these locations are currently closed to the public, older adults would have difficulty directly accessing this program.

The proposed temporary waiver would allow eligible older adults to complete their application over the phone or electronically, with vouchers mailed directly to their homes.

“During this pandemic, ensuring that older adults get the nutrition they need without fear of being exposed to COVID-19 is a top priority for our department. With senior centers still closed and Area Agencies on Aging operating virtually, we need to provide flexibility in how older adults can apply for the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program,” said Secretary Torres. “Making these temporary changes will help older Pennsylvanians gain access to this valuable program.”

In addition to advocating for contact-free eligibility verification, the administration asked for additional administrative funds to cover banking costs incurred by farmers and partner agencies with increased costs for mailing vouchers and other required

materials. At a time when budgets have been put under increasing financial strains, the provision of these administrative funds would relieve some of the additional costs incurred in carrying out this program.

For more on food security in Pennsylvania, visit agriculture.pa.gov/foodsecurity. 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.