



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**May 13, 2020**

[View Online](#)

## **Secretary of Agriculture Urges Congressional Support of Pennsylvania's Vital Agriculture, Food Industries through Federal Stimulus**

**Harrisburg, PA** – Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding this week wrote to Pennsylvania's congressional delegation asking for urgent support of Pennsylvania's agriculture and food industries that have continued to operate and sustain life in the commonwealth despite the great risk, stress, uncertainty, and disruption brought by COVID-19.

"Our recovery and our national security are impossible without the certainty of a safe, secure, and available food supply, and the necessary protections to those working in these industries," said Secretary Redding. "I write to urge congressional action in the next stimulus to support these vital industries."

Below are some of the suggested supports Redding outlined in the [letter](#):

### **Workforce support and protections:**

- To include funding for Personal Protective Equipment for the entire agriculture industry and food supply chain, from farmers to grocery store workers;
- Funding for infrastructure investments for enhanced worker safety in food processing facilities, grocery stores, farmers markets, restaurants, on-farms, and seasonal farm labor camp housing;
- And support for a federal tax holiday for grocery and convenience store employees from February 15 through June 15 for individuals making less than \$75,000 annually.

### **Stressed industries support:**

- Including support for Pennsylvania dairy through direct payments or loans to farmers, support for processors, federal purchase of dairy products for distribution through the charitable food system, and reopening enrollment for the Dairy Margin Coverage program;
- Support for the livestock and poultry industries including technical and financial support to help producers pivot to direct marketing, and direct payments to poultry and egg producers, who were not listed for the USDA's initial round of direct payments; in addition to support for swine, beef, small ruminants, and aquaculture.

- Purchases of specialty crops such as mushrooms, fruits, and vegetables to support the charitable food system and ensure food does not go to waste; compensation for specialty crops list due to COVID-19 disruptions.
- Especially harmed by the timing of COVID-19, Pennsylvania's horticulture and green industries should receive direct payments or other forms of business assistance to help cover losses.
- A working capital fund for restaurants to provide grants to rehire staff, hire sanitizing services, purchase PPE, retool supply chains to incorporate more local food purchasing, or retool business models from on-site dining to more carry-out, drive-through, and catering options.
- Farmers markets and on-farm markets deemed essential from the beginning of COVID-19 need innovative support like credit card scanners, IT support, and enhanced sanitation; they need equitable access to federal programs and resources.

### **Mental health support:**

- Funding and resources for mental health services for the agriculture and restaurant sectors authorized in the CARES Act, a critical need to support those working so hard to sustain life.
- Funding for telehealth initiatives to improve care in rural communities by connecting residents across the commonwealth to medical professionals and ensure those in need receive the best care available when needed.

### **Food insecurity protections:**

- Expanding access to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to provide relief to Pennsylvanians and the charitable food system;
- Expansion of USDA's GUS Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program to maximize buying power for SNAP recipients, especially at farmers markets, without need for additional applications from vendors;
- Grocery delivery for SNAP participants who are seniors, immunocompromised, or otherwise unable to travel safely to a grocery store.

“Thank you for your work during this crisis and continued commitment to the commonwealth and its residents,” added Redding. “Our nation relies on a strong, sustainable agricultural economy. We’re committed to working hard, together, to get through this pandemic.”

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](https://agriculture.pa.gov/COVID). For the most accurate, timely information related to Health in Pennsylvania, visit [on.pa.gov/coronavirus](https://on.pa.gov/coronavirus).