



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Family Farms and Farmers Markets Are Essential

Farmers Market Coalition urges federal, state, and local leaders to protect our nation's food producers and farmers markets through federal stimulus and clear operational guidelines

Washington, D.C., March 18, 2020 – Congress is close to passing its second multi-billion dollar stimulus package and is hard at work on a third – this one focused on small businesses. As a national nonprofit organization providing support to 1,200 market organizations representing nearly half of all farmers markets in the United States, Farmers Market Coalition (FMC) urges Congress to ensure that the next stimulus package explicitly includes support for family farm businesses and farmers markets. Farmers markets are a vital economic force in America, both locally and nationally, accounting for \$711 million in sales annually. By providing much-needed relief in the next stimulus package, Congress can keep the economic engine of America's farmers markets humming, while also providing much needed food access to consumers across the country.

"Farmers markets deserve to be included in the federal aid package," said Ben Feldman, Executive Director of FMC. "Unfortunately, neither of the first two packages are guaranteed to provide aid to American farmers who sell directly to the public, nor to the community-based organizations who operate farmers markets. Farmers are America's original small businesspeople, and farmers markets are an essential food access point for communities seeking fresh, healthy food – in particular for low-income families who are able to access the freshest fruits and vegetables through markets' SNAP EBT and WIC programs."

There are several steps that Congress and the Administration can take today that will provide much-needed relief for farmers markets and family farmers:

- **Direct USDA to develop an emergency disaster payment to small and beginning farmers selling fresh and minimally processed food through direct marketing channels such as farmers markets that have been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak.**
- **Introduce Administrative flexibility for the Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program, Value Added Producer Grant program, and Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentives Program** by removing the matching funds requirements from both programs, extending deadlines, and expediting review and approval of projects.
- **Encourage state agencies participating in the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) to make bulk purchases for 2020 and make local produce accessible to WIC-Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) participants by allowing state agencies to purchase FMNP farmers' produce in bulk.**

In addition to stimulus aid and making administrative tweaks to federal programs, state and local governments must also provide clarity regarding markets' ability to continue operating during the pandemic. Across the country, there have been many encouraging examples of new market

protocols – for example, in LA County – that have allowed markets to continue operating while also ensuring social distancing and the implementation of best practice public health standards.

“The COVID-19 pandemic affects every person in America, and requires swift action by this Administration, as well as by elected officials at all levels,” said Feldman. “At a time when many Americans are concerned about being able to access food for their families, we must ensure that farmers markets can continue to meet this need. If grocery stores are open, then farmers markets should be open, too.”

FMC is committed to working with our market partners and with our champions in Congress to ensure that farmers markets can continue providing high quality, nutritious food to families across the country. It is important during this time of crisis to realize that the decisions we make today will impact food and farm business for months and years to come. FMC urges Congress and our leaders in state and local government to do the right thing and keep America’s family farmers in business.

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About Farmers Market Coalition:

The Farmers Market Coalition (FMC) is a national nonprofit that strengthens farmers markets and local communities by providing support and resources to member markets and market organizations, state associations, and direct agricultural leaders. FMC is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to strengthening farmers markets for the benefit of farmers, consumers, and communities. Learn more at: farmersmarketcoalition.org