

# USDA Pandemic Aid for Farmers: Action Toolkit

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### • Quick Reference Materials and Links

The situation: USDA is preparing to distribute \$16 billion in direct aid to farmers and ranchers who have experienced financial losses due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Applications for the program, called the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP), will be open in early May - but the program as currently designed will leave out thousands of farmers. These are unprecedented times - now is the time to urge USDA to fix problems with the program so aid can get to all who need it.

The problem: USDA's aid program may leave folks out. It isn't set up to account for farmers who sell into local/regional markets, diversified farmers, or organic farmers, it doesn't have a thorough outreach plan or reserved funding for underserved producers (including farmers of color), it doesn't reflect realistic timelines for farmers' losses or their increased expenses in addition to their losses, and it isn't set up to focus aid on independent, family-scale producers who need help (instead of large corporate operations). **USDA has not yet released full details on their program - so now is the time to ask questions and speak up to ensure the program works for all farmers in need of aid.**

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** *there are many needs in our farm and food system right now amidst the crisis. This toolkit focuses on one that we can influence this week: ensuring USDA aid specifically designated by Congress for farmers gets to farmers who need it. As always, it's ok to be working on many issues and asks at the same time given the many needs in the field.*

What we can do:

- We can *share stories* that show who is missing from the program and at risk of being left out
- We can *ask questions* to highlight issues, concerns, and gaps in information about the program
- We can *demand* that USDA do better for farmers and ranchers and share solutions

How we can do it:

- Farmers: you can *share stories* on social media - along with asks - and tag USDA!
- Farmers: you can *call* your county FSA office to register your concerns and ask questions

- Farmer allies: you can *amplify* farmers' stories and publicly stand with farmers at risk of being left out of USDA aid

What we're asking USDA to change:

- Provide payments to farmers selling into local/regional channels who have lost markets
- Conduct a thorough outreach program to reach all farmers and reserve funding for underserved producers, including farmers of color
- Focus funding toward family farms, not corporate middlemen

Links:

- NSAC Action Page: <https://sustainableagriculture.net/take-action/>
- FSA County Office Directory: <https://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app>
- USDA Press Release (official source of program details thus far): <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2020/04/17/usda-announces-coronavirus-food-assistance-program>

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## • FARMERS - Telling Your Story

*Farmer serving organizations: USDA is most likely to listen to farmers directly. Help encourage your farmer base to weigh in using the messaging below. Feel free to adapt, modify, and/or share everything here directly with farmer audiences - mix and match what's helpful and modify to fit your voice and your community, just please keep hashtag and tagging guidance.*

### Social Media Samples, Hashtags, and Handles

The most effective thing you can do is share your own story in your own voice - with photos. Most importantly – speak up about the impacts you are seeing, the market losses you are experiencing, the innovating you are doing, and why it's important that USDA supports farmers like you. You don't need to have all the answers – just be willing to speak up in your own words! Your own stories, photos, and questions are most important - as is tagging USDA! Here's a guide to get you started:

Hashtag to use: **#dobetterUSDA**, **#plant2020** (it's planting season, and USDA is closely following spring planting across the country with the hashtag #plant2020. Has your planting been affected by the pandemic? Use this hashtag too!)

Handles to tag: USDA is @USDA on Facebook and Twitter. Tag your Congressional representative and Senators too! You can look them up here: <https://www.govtrack.us>

- Twitter sample -

Hey @USDA - [your farm] needs #coronavirus aid - I'm worried you will leave us out. This is a photo of [your fields, your crops, etc - what does the photo illustrate?]. [Sample Qs you can use: How can diversified farmers show their losses? How can organic farmers qualify at organic prices? What about farmers whose losses came after April 16? How will you ensure equitable aid to farmers of color? etc] We need you to #dobetterUSDA!

- Facebook sample -

Hey @USDA - my farm has experienced major financial losses due to #coronavirus, but I'm looking for information and your farmer aid program doesn't seem to include funds for farmers like me. This is a photo of [your fields, your crops, etc] - [share your story here - how has your farm been impacted and what does the photo illustrate?]. [Sample Qs you can use: How can diversified farmers show their losses? How can organic farmers qualify at organic prices? What about farmers whose losses came after April 16? How will you ensure equitable aid to farmers of color? How can this program help me? etc]. We need you to #dobetterUSDA!

### **Call Scripts and Guidance for Calling USDA FSA Offices**

*We recommend that farmers who feel comfortable doing so reach out to their FSA offices to ask questions about the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program. This will provide farmers an early opportunity to receive information on the program as it becomes available. It will also elevate for USDA concerns about how this program will work for small-scale, diversified, and direct-market farmers.*

Basic instructions -

- Look up your county office via the FSA County Office Directory:  
<https://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app>
- Give them a call!
- Introduce yourself, your farm, what you do
- Let them know you're calling about the new *USDA Coronavirus Food Assistance Program* \$16 billion in farmer aid and that you have some questions about your eligibility
- Keep us posted about what you hear! Send news you learn from your FSA office to [alerts@sustainableagriculture.net](mailto:alerts@sustainableagriculture.net)

Example questions to consider when you call your FSA county office -

- I hear there is aid money available for small farmers who sell at farmers markets and directly to schools and local restaurants which have been impacted by the pandemic. Do you have any information about how to apply for that?
- Do I need to have any sort of documentation of my sales or losses? How do I show the pandemic's impact on my business? [If you are a diversified grower - I grow and sell X varieties of crops and am able to capture a price premium for them. How can I ensure this is reflected in my aid?]
- Is there a way to get support if I am still able to sell my crops but my costs of production, marketing, and delivery have increased because of changing protocols? (Increasing home delivery, paying staff for added time sanitizing, additional safety equipment/PPE, etc.)
- Will I qualify for this program if most of my farm income comes later in the year?
- How will USDA handle payments to diversified farmers who don't produce just one commodity? [Share a little bit about what you grow / raise]
- How can I prove my losses and price information as a certified organic farmer?

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## **• FARMER ALLIES - Standing with Producers**

### **Social Media Samples, Hashtags, and Handles**

As allies, we can be effective by advocating for the producers across the country who continue to grow food for us when we need it the most. You don't need to have all the answers, nor do farmers – we're still missing

critical program details! Right now, just be willing to speak up in your own words and stand with farmers! Consider posting a message like the ones below - or customize it entirely to fit your community.

Another option: if you're an organization and you've been collecting stories already from farmers you work with, you could ask folks' permission to share their aggregated stories (or a collection of farmers' stories and quotes) from your account.

Hashtag to use: #dobetterUSDA

Handles to tag: USDA is @USDA on Facebook and Twitter. Tag your Congressional representative and Senators too! You can look them up here: [govtrack.us](http://govtrack.us)

- Twitter sample -

Hey @USDA - Underserved [or organic, diversified, or farmers of color, etc] farmers need #coronavirus aid too! How will you include underserved farmers in the USDA aid program? Don't leave out farmers in need. We need you to #dobetterUSDA! #istandwithfarmers

Hey @USDA - [name of farm you are mentioning] is an amazing farm feeding our community during #coronavirus - I'm worried your aid program will leave them out. [include a photo if you can]. [Will you help diversified farmers? Will you help organic farmers? How will you ensure equitable aid to farmers of color?] We need you to #dobetterUSDA!

- Facebook sample -

Hey @USDA - Farmers and ranchers across the country are feeling the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic. Markets are upended, farmers and farm workers are in need of safety equipment, and everyone is working hard to get food to people amidst many challenges. I'm worried to see that now, to make things worse, the government's new farmer aid program doesn't seem to include some of the farmers who will be hit hardest and who are doing the most critical work feeding communities. USDA: [Will you help diversified farmers? Will you help organic farmers? How will you ensure equitable aid to farmers of color?] Now is the time for us to stand up for the resilient, innovative farmers and producers who are keeping their communities fed in a crisis despite lost markets. In a global state of emergency - how will you ensure that the ones feeding us are able to stay afloat? We need you to #dobetterUSDA!

### **Sample Newsletter Text**

As farmers and ranchers across the country are feeling the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, USDA is preparing to distribute \$16 billion in direct aid to producers who have experienced financial losses. Applications for the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program will be open in early May - but the program as currently designed may leave out thousands of farmers - including producers who sell into local and regional markets and producers historically underserved by USDA, including farmers of color. These are unprecedented times - now is the time to urge USDA to fix problems with the program so aid can get to all who need it.

USDA's plan isn't set up to account for farmers who sell into local/regional markets, diversified farmers, or organic farmers, it doesn't have a thorough outreach plan or reserved funding for underserved producers (including farmers of color), it doesn't reflect realistic timelines for farmers' losses or their increased expenses in addition to their losses, and it isn't set up to focus aid on independent, family-scale producers who need help (instead of large corporate operations). Farmers are in need of help now more than ever.

**USDA has not yet released full details on their program - so now is the time to ask questions and speak up to ensure the program works for all farmers in need of aid.**

USDA has the power to ensure these farmers have support through this unprecedented situation. *Now* is the time for us to *demand* better from USDA. How can you help?

- We can *share stories* that show who is missing from the program and at risk of being left out. If you're a farmer: share your story on social media, tagging USDA and using the hashtag #dobetterUSDA
- We can *ask questions* to highlight issues, concerns, and gaps in information about the program. If you're a farmer: call your county FSA office to ask key questions about the program and who it serves.
- We can *demand* that USDA do better for farmers and ranchers and share solutions. Not a farmer? Post on social media to stand with [your state/region] farmers and amplify their voices!

The most effective thing you can do is share your own story in your own voice - with photos. Most importantly – speak up about the impacts you are seeing, the market losses you are experiencing, the innovating you are doing, and why it's important that USDA supports farmers like you. You don't need to have all the answers – just be willing to speak up in your own words! Learn more and get sample language and guidance here: [link to your website]

### **How Organizations Can Weigh in With USDA / FSA**

As allies and advocates, we want to be able to support farmers and ranchers in a way that is productive and effective. For now, you can work on encouraging farmers you have relationships with to weigh in via social media and with FSA directly.

What you can do soon: we are awaiting a formal rulemaking comment period where you will have the opportunity to comment on how this program is being implemented. NSAC members and partners are encouraged to work with us in quickly analyzing the rule and official sign-up materials once they are available - from there we will develop more highly detailed technical questions for the agency, plus materials and sample comments for folks to use in direct outreach efforts with local, state, and national USDA officials.

### **Sample Sharing Graphics**



Download several here:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/l96e3lwerbr1z09/AADm-nZJCjW-7mklpy89qEVTa?dl=0>