

DRAFT ATCFPB COVID-19 Food System Response - emergency/short-term responses

The document with the mid- to long-range policy and budget requests have been separated out to focus the requests on different time-scales. The other document can be found here:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1zBuK3yHR_1VSD9wFb1PNf3n7h24o6Q-cgPdgZSKAMQc/edit?usp=sharing

NOTE: Thank you for your time contributing to this document. Since we are working to have as many voices add to this document as possible, please do not delete verbiage or suggestions. Please use strikethrough (Format -> Type -> Strikethrough) to add comments, suggest edits, and particularly removal/edits of ideas or change to “Suggesting” from “Editing” which is the equivalent to track changes .

The COVID-19 outbreak and the responses implemented to mitigate its further spread are disrupting every part of our local food system. Nearly all aspects of the food system from producers, retailers, processors, restaurants, schools, emergency food agencies, and other businesses and institutions have had to transform the way they operate, in many cases shutting down. Most are losing revenue and opportunities that will prevent them from recovering. Food system workers have lost jobs in record numbers, and a number of those jobs will not be available when the crisis lifts. Every household has had to adapt as well, as access to food has become limited and inconsistent, particularly for those already struggling with food insecurity.¹

The Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board works to advocate for a robust, resilient local food system. We have worked to compile this response and recommendations based on the issues and concerns that are being highlighted in the current pandemic circumstances, as well as recommendations and best practices from a variety of stakeholders and other sources to address impact being felt throughout our local food sector. This list is not complete. Given the on-going nature and uncertain duration of this crisis, new and unpredicted issues will continue to come to light. Additionally, with time for analysis when we have emerged from emergency circumstances, more action will be required. However, we have a generational opportunity to use this time of crisis and reflection to bring to life a vision of nourishment and planetary health for all.

Every action taken to prevent the further spread of COVID-19, feed people during this crisis, and support and rebuild food system businesses and institutions must include a commitment to ensuring racial and economic equity and recognize that food access is essential to justice. Communities of color, indigenous, and immigrant communities were disproportionately excluded from equitable access to food, public benefits, and decision-making power long before this crisis began. Responses to the crisis must commit to eliminating these inequities.²

¹ [Massachusetts Food System Collaborative Local Food System Policy Recommendations in Response to COVID-19](#)

² *ibid.*

We recognize that this pandemic presents serious challenges, but it also provides an opportunity to come together in solidarity, to share information, understand the deep inequities within our community, strategize solutions to address these, and develop responses that protect and connect our food system³ while creating access to food for diverse food-insecure communities. For that to happen, we need to ensure that the links in the local food value chain have the funding and infrastructure to continue their work of creating access to food and strengthening communities.

Local food systems drive the economy of a place, create community, and provide jobs along with benefits for environmental sustainability, health, and nutrition. They are also more resilient to a disruptive shock like the coronavirus crisis. Local food systems are a key component of any effort to address food insecurity during a crisis. These systems provide capacity to produce and supply food to organizations and partnerships that are working to address food insecurity.

Collaborative efforts among nonprofits and feeding organizations are taking a leading role in addressing spikes in food insecurity and creating deeper access and reach into food insecure communities. New and innovative collaborations are needed which include partnerships with diverse public and private sector organizations that can provide needed capital and infrastructure to financially support the collaborations, support the food system, stimulate the food economy, and provide access to food to food insecure and under-resourced communities.

As businesses close and paychecks stop coming, food insecurity will continue to grow. Emergency relief for farms, processors, restaurants, and other small businesses negatively impacted by the disruptions to the food chain brought about by the response to COVID-19 must be in the form of grants and cash supports, rather than loans that place these vulnerable businesses in further debt at a time when they have no income and may not recover in order to pay it back.

To ensure local and regional food systems can continue to feed our communities, we support the recommended actions across the following areas:

In support of individuals and households accessing food

- A. Freeze rent and mortgage payments.
- B. Increase SNAP benefits

In support of producers, small food businesses, and non-profits supporting the local food system

- C. Fund and provide other support for school systems serving as feeding hubs for students and caregivers.
- D. Increase emergency funding for food banks and food pantries to pay farmers for food with a priority for food they can't sell due to market disruptions.
- E. Support food and food support businesses to allow them to provide compensation for all displaced workers.

³ [Call to Action on Food System Disruption by Coronavirus](#)

- F. Strengthen partnerships between public and private organizations that provide support to farms and other food system businesses.
 - G. Provide grants to organizations that are working to adapt to disruptions brought about by COVID-19 and the response.
 - H. Suspend meal taxes, payroll taxes, local taxes, licensing fees, and other public fees.
 - I. Provide protections from evictions, foreclosures, and delinquency penalties ~~on personal~~ and business loans for small food business owners and food system workers whose income has been disrupted..
 - J. Provide incentives for grocers, restaurants, and other food suppliers to increase food access by connecting directly with local charitable emergency feeding organizations to decrease food waste and increase equitable food distribution amongst all populations.
 - K. Revise the food enterprise permitting system in connection to charitable feeding organizations as called for in the ATCFPB Recommendation 20190909 – 5ii1 Charitable Feeding Organization Permit.
 - L. Facilitate movement in the food supply chain by securing transportation and storage infrastructure to avoid food loss and move food to where it is needed, i.e., school buses to deliver meals, large freezer and refrigerator facilities to store food.
 - M. Expand support for farmers markets, which play a critical role in feeding our community. Because SNAP benefits are doubled for fresh fruits and vegetables at farmers markets they combat food insecurity and deliver nutrient-dense produce to our most vulnerable neighbors. We also know that local farmers and makers, in addition to providing locally-grown food, also provide locally-grown jobs.
 - N. Provide incentives and assistance at farmers’ markets to reduce handling at markets and promote social distancing through on-line ordering platforms and curbside pick-up.⁴
- II. In support of workers - look at food worker advocacy group language/requests)
- A. Support essential food system workers (e.g., grocery clerks and stockers, fast food workers, food hub workers, school meal preparers) through access to resources and benefits including:
 1. Paid sick leave
 2. Free child care.
 3. (Temporary) Health insurance and/or stipends to cover medical expenses related to emergency health/pandemic costs.
 4. Support essential worker access to readily available mental health care during emergency response circumstances.
 5. Require large food businesses provide sick pay, hazard pay, family leave, and respect the right to organize.
 - B. Require employers to provide workers with accurate and current information on how to protect themselves and their communities from the virus in a language they understand, that is culturally appropriate, and at a literacy level that is appropriate.⁵

⁴ <https://www.oeffa.org/news/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COVID-Emergency-Response-OEFFA-2.pdf>

⁵ <http://foodchainworkers.org/2020/03/what-food-workers-on-the-front-lines-need-right-now/>

- C. Require employers guarantee safe workplaces, including providing all necessary protective equipment, frequent and regular hand-washing breaks, and the required space for “social distancing.” Farmworkers must be provided easy access to clean and a sufficient amount of water at close proximity to the work site.⁶
1. Example: El Buen was staffed by 90% volunteers but during pandemic it went to all staff. Drive-through method still requires intake interactions so visitors need to have gloves and masks as well. In their zip code they have a high number of cases so they are considering face shields.

In support of emergency food access

- D. Food Pricing, Distribution and Supply Controls - control distribution, allocation or rationing of food, or to control its supply or price.
1. Create a centralized resource for accessing cold storage and freezers, such as connecting restaurants and other establishments with cold storage and other storage capacity into the network of emergency food distribution centers and organizations, such as food pantries. This network and capacity are needed now and can be utilized in the event of future crises.
- E. Ensure special allowances and flexibilities for food service establishments.
- F. Develop new models, partnerships, and supply chains during this time of crisis that can serve as a working framework for future times of crisis and strengthen our local food system for the long-term.
1. Examples include, coordinated food systems to include all food providers throughout Travis County to systematically address food insecurity, addressing food deserts and areas of most need.
 2. Establish a coordination network of food access providers/ pantries /feeding organizations that strategically assesses, coordinates efforts, and ensures full “access to food” across food deserts and food-insecure communities.
 3. Incentivize innovation and collaboration amongst networks of emergency food access providers.
- G. Support essential worker access to readily available mental health care during emergency response circumstances.

Budget Requests

- *****Additional staff/budget working on food in the city and county - FTE funding**
- *******Increase emergency funding for food banks and food pantries to pay farmers for food with a priority for food they can’t sell due to market disruptions.
- Connection to budget recommendation on developing regional food system planning process and an equity toolkit/screening tool to evaluate food access work.
 - Recommendation(s) developed by Healthy Food Access WG - in progress
- Funding for studies to expand city’s food resilience and emergency planning; from field to distribution to retail, and in different population sets

⁶ *ibid.*

- Funding to enhance preparedness capacity of FAOs – support planning, backups, coordination and communication, critical site identification and designation
- Funding for collaboration efforts and task force development for food access and mental health for front line and essential workers

Other Local Efforts

Central Texas for Business Task Force:

https://www.austinchamber.com/blog/announcing-the-opening-central-texas-for-business-task-force?fbclid=IwAR15r74AIR-hJ4F6O2cosfV_n6qSEdspofHPfuOf4YgJSI4nbewglMHgJjQ

The work of this task force is to honor public health priorities and focus on how to thoughtfully and safely reopen our regional economy. Key activities for the task force will include:

- Evaluating and accounting for specific needs by industry sector
- Evaluating the preparedness level of businesses to safeguard public health
- Educating the business community on public health requirements and best practices
- Monitoring public health outcomes to determine whether adjustments are needed
- Providing feedback to policymakers

Office of Sustainability

- Coordinating data collection efforts around food access and other social determinants of health across Austin/Travis County

References:

<https://www.nationalobserver.com/2020/03/24/opinion/covid-19-crisis-tipping-point-will-we-invest-planetary-health-or-oil-and-gas>

<https://www.healthyschoolfood.ca/post/mobilizing-communities-to-increase-access-to-healthy-food-while-schools-are-closed>

Wallace Center National Good Food Conference Call to Action:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1fDxtAjcuo6Q9TuAQm4IEciPga0qkXVVxGpRFc7-Onsw/edit>

[Massachusetts Food System Collaborative Local Food System Policy Recommendations in Response to COVID-19](#)

<http://foodchainworkers.org/2020/03/what-food-workers-on-the-front-lines-need-right-now/>

Ohio Ecological Food and Farmers Association COVID-19 Policy Recommendations:

<https://www.oeffa.org/news/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COVID-Emergency-Response-OEFFA-2.pdf>

ATCFPB Recommendation 20190909 – 5ii1 Charitable Feeding Organization Permit.