

COVID 19 Resources for Farms, Food Businesses and Food Systems Practitioners

by the Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Farm, Food and Enterprise Development Program

This document shares resources regarding COVID-19 response within our food supply and value chain. This second version of COVID-19 resources focuses on farm to school efforts and community gardens while also sharing best practices and resources for general food systems components.

COVID-19 Impact

For the latest information and information on health and economic indicators, see [Impact Planning for COVID](#) and [Global Impact](#) from Esri Demographics.

The [World Health Organization](#) also has many resources and updates about the evolving global pandemic.

While our communities continue to react and respond to the on-going pandemic and disaster we are facing, many different innovative options have come up through policies, technologies, and general collective action. This is not a comprehensive overview of all aspects, but covers some best practices and options that individuals, businesses and communities may consider as they relate to food systems: farming, food businesses, and general distribution and connections.

Federal Policy

In response to the on-going pandemic, the federal government put into law the [CARES Act](#) (Coronavirus Aid-Relief and Economic Security) on March 27, 2020. Many different press releases and publications have come out regarding the exact impact of the CARES Act (Penn State Extension, 2020; Newton, 2020). The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition has detailed their response within the blog [A Closer Look at Farmer Relief in Senate Pandemic Aid Package](#).

USDA began a [Coronavirus Food Assistance Program](#) (CFAP) to support farmers and consumers (USDA, 2017). Support for farm resources from USDA can be found through the [Farmers.gov](#) website, with information on CFAP, loans, crop insurance, small business programs, and online resources.

USDA [Food and Nutrition Services responding to COVID-19](#) through several different waivers for existing programs. [Choose My plate](#) has both English and Spanish resources online for food planning during the COVID-19 pandemic. [Meals for Kids](#) offer a site finder for finding food during COVID-19 when schools are closed.

- Iowa State Resource: [Spend Smart. Eat Smart.](#)

\$349 billion was outlined in the "Paycheck Protection Program" within the SBA for loans and potentially forgivable loans. There are also local programs available, such as the [small business relief grant program](#) and the [Des Moines Small Business Recovery Grant](#) in Iowa.

- Small business loans and support are available in different forms: [The Small Business Owner's Guide to the CARES Act](#)
- There is also an option for [Paycheck Protection Program](#)
- Who is eligible for [Small Business Relief Grants?](#)

Food System Impact:

Farmers experience impacts to COVID-19 in exceptional ways, including being essential workers. The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture stated it well: "Agriculture's role is unquestionable: access to food is a right, we need local agriculture now more than ever" (Smith-Brubaker, 2020). An [economic impact assessment](#) was completed for the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition in March 2020 to understand the impacts of COVID-19 on farms that sell into local markets. This study included farmers markets, farm to school, and food hubs serving other institutions and restaurants. The study predicts a "\$689 million decline in sales from March to May 2020, leading to a payroll decline of up to \$103 million and a total loss to the economy of up to \$1.3 billion" (Thilmany, Jablonski, Tropp, Angelo, & Low, 2020).

Farmers Markets:

Farmers markets continue to determine strategies for re-opening, moving to virtual operations, or closing for the season.

As we begin the farmers market season in Iowa, consider the following resources for implementation.

- [COVID-19 Farmers Market signage](#) – Iowa Valley RC&D
- [Social Media Tips](#) – Iowa Valley RC&D
- [Vendor pre-order](#) forms – Texas Farmers Market

Additionally, several different options exist for transitioning to online sales.

- [Barn2Door](#)
- [Cropolis](#)
- [CSAware](#)
- [Farmers Web](#)
- [FarmDrop](#)
- [Farmigo](#)
- [GrazeCart](#)
- [GrownBy](#)
- [HarvestHand](#)
- [Harvie](#)
- [Local Line](#)
- [Local Food Marketplace](#)
- [Local Orbit](#)
- [Meat Suite](#)
- [Open Food Network](#)
- [Shopify](#)
- [WhatsGood](#)

For additional resources and guidance on virtual sales:

Oregon Tilth [webinar about online sales](#) platforms for direct-to-consumer sales.

Continue to utilize local food directories, such as [Market Maker](#) and online resources to support your local food businesses and farmers.

Farm to School and Early Care

Farm to School Supply Chains

Collaboration at both the local and state level are coming together to support farm to school and early care initiatives amidst COVID-19. At the local level, schools and early care sites are innovating meal service initiatives and partnering with local food system practitioners. The National Farm to School Network (NFSN) is maintaining a [webpage](#) related to COVID-19 Resources for Farm to School and ECE, and is collecting supply chain response strategies from national partners, [highlighting the strength of resilient community food systems](#) emerging through the pandemic (National Farm to School Network, 2020). NFSN reports that "states are having success incorporating local food into emergency feeding programs when existing relationships between schools and producers are strong and when lines of communication remain open between both parties" (Harris & Stephens, 2020).

Similarly, regional and state-level collaborators are also rolling out emergency meal programs. Food hubs, state agencies, school districts, and state-level food system coalitions are working together to aggregate and distribute foods to meet the needs of families and local producers. This work is exemplified regionally across Iowa. In Northeast Iowa, the Iowa Food Hub has been [supplying food for school district's Grab n' Go meals](#) and are working to launch new platforms for [early care sites to purchase local food online](#).

Federal and State Child Nutrition Programs

To ensure children are fed during unanticipated school closures, state and federal child nutrition programs are building flexibility into when and how meals are provided to youth. The USDA has issued Nationwide [federal waivers](#) to offer different options for serving meals, including Grab n' Go meals, meal delivery services, non-congregate meal settings, and meal time flexibility. Departments of Education also applied for federal waivers to allow for flexibility in distributing meals in non-area eligible locations. (Iowa: COVID-19 Waivers and Flexibilities, 2020). The Tisch Center for Food, Education, and Policy has been [tracking](#) how school districts are feeding students across the country, and have shared a [series of best practices](#) centered on expanding access, eliminating barriers, ensuring safety, and communicating with clarity and transparency (Serving Students During the Coronavirus: Best Practices, 2020).

Summer Meal Sites

As federal and state mandates regarding school closures continue to evolve, state agencies and schools are working to determine how best to transition to the [Summer Food Service Program](#) in the regular summer months. The Nationwide waivers are effective through June 30, 2020, or until the expiration of the federally declared public health emergency, whichever is earlier, which will allow these new flexibilities to be extended into summer services. To locate Iowa's operating meal sites and those approved for summer service in Iowa, use and share the following resources (Summer Food Service Program, 2020):

- Search the [USDA's "Meals for Kids"](#) interactive map
- Call 211 or 1-866-3-HUNGRY
- Text "FOOD" or "COMIDA" to 877-877.
 - Services are available in English and Spanish.

Iowa Farm to Summer Campaign

Partners with ISUEO FFED, the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, the Iowa Department of Education, and FoodCorps Iowa are working to include local foods in summer meal programs through the [2020 Iowa Farm to Summer Campaign, "Crunch into Cucumbers!"](#) Summer meal sites and community partners are encouraged to participate by purchasing and serving local cucumbers, and other local foods, throughout the summer. If your meal program is interested in participating, complete [this short application](#) by May 20th to apply for funding, promotional materials, and technical assistance.

Additional Farm to School and Early Care Information and Resources

[The Iowa Farm to School and Early Care Coalition](#) is maintaining a living document of relevant resources for the Iowa Farm to School Network. The document, [COVID-19 Resources & Strategies for Iowa Farm to School and Early Care](#), will be updated regularly with Iowa-specific and national resources responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and includes the following resource categories: local food procurement for food service staff and farmers, food education through distance learning, gardening at home with youth, equity and justice, finances and funding, food safety, community and self-care, and professional development for educators.

Community Gardens and COVID-19

COVID-19 is causing uncertainty within community gardens as well, however, there are several gardens that are still operating with social distancing and food safety procedures in place. While some gardens have temporarily closed, many states and organizations have deemed community gardens essential to help with food access and economic impacts due to the pandemic.

A few of those states include Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Florida and Iowa. According to Philadelphia's Parks and Recreational Department, "gardens are essential and life-sustaining, thus OK to operate during the current emergency" (Jaramillo, 2020). Florida's Pasco County Extension has seen increased demand for gardens and no longer has plots available (Blazonis, 2020). Gardeners and community garden sites are responding to the need by expanding gardens to provide fresh produce to local food banks in response to food shortages in local grocery stores, as well as increased demand for fresh produce (Alabama Public Radio, 2020).

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach has resources available for community gardens in Iowa through the [community donation gardening toolkit](#). Additionally, there is signage available for sharing [safety considerations](#).

Nation-wide, organizations have developed best practices for safely using and managing community gardens during the pandemic, including guidelines and recommendations for garden management, best practices for visitors, and additional sanitation procedures. The following practices have been adopted from the following practices have been compiled from Purdue University, North Carolina State University, and University of Florida IFAS Extension.

Management Practices

- "Communicate to all potential audiences that they should **not** visit the garden if they feel ill, have tested positive for COVID-19 within the last two weeks or have had known contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 within the last two weeks." Additionally, anyone showing signs of illness should not enter the site (Purdue University, 2020);
 - CDC one-pager for [If You Are Feeling Sick](#)
- Cloth face coverings, such as masks, should be worn by all employees (University of Florida IFAS Extension, 2020);
- Consider bringing own tools and sanitizing tools after use;

- Limit the number of people allowed on site at one time based on the size of garden and plots (Jaramillo, 2020; Neighbor Space, 2020), overall, gatherings are still limited to 10 people or fewer (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention);
 - Stagger arrival times to further limit the number of people on site (Purdue University, 2020);
 - Remain at least 6 feet apart from others while on site;
 - Limit the amount of time spent in the garden, only doing essential activities/work;
- Implement handwashing and sanitation stations with proper signage for use (University of Florida IFAS Extension, 2020);
 - CDC one-pager [Stop the Spread of Germs](#) and [print resources](#)
 - Follow the EPA's [guidelines on disinfectants for use against SARS-CoV-2](#)
 - Follow these steps developed by the EPA for [safe and effective disinfectant use](#)
- Thoroughly rinse all produce from the garden before use or donation;
- Remove or block off public seating areas like benches and tables (Purdue University, 2020);
- Cancel or postpone events (Purdue University, 2020);
- Leave gates open during open hours to further minimize contact with surfaces (Purdue University, 2020);
- Communicate all new procedures and garden policies with employees, volunteers, and community members utilizing the garden (N.C. A&T State University Cooperative Extension).

As we all continue into the uncertain future with COVID-19 response and recovery, consider ways to continue to support and be involved with your community while being mindful of social distancing practices.

Iowa State connections and support:

If there is interest in discussion on action steps, please feel free to reach out to our teams in the Farm, Food and Enterprise Development Program or participate in our [technical assistance request platform](#).

Small Farms: Christa Hartsook: hartc@iastate.edu

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Food Systems: Courtney Long: court7@iastate.edu

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