

Food System Resilience in a time of crisis: considerations and resources for the community.

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<http://witmeetsgrit.com/food-for-thought-reducing-the-ripple-effect-of-covid-19-on-the-food-system/>

UPDATED 3/20 [*See time sensitive advocacy issues at the bottom*] **Times of crisis test not only the character of individuals but reveal the flaws in our man-made systems - including how we get food from farm to table.** As we face the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic, many will feel a loss of control, safety and security. It is natural to cycle through the stages of grief during times like these: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. As someone working with nonprofits and farmers (arguably the riskiest small business of all), we must quickly move to the next stage: action. Nonprofits notoriously run on shoe string budgets, tenuous at the best of times; these organizations face further pressure in times of crisis because they often are charged with serving the most under resourced, under represented, and vulnerable populations. In parallel, our food system (especially our local food supply chain) from [farmers](#), [field workers](#) and food hubs to [food banks](#), [farmers markets](#), and [restaurants](#), are all operating on the tightest of margins, the lowest of wages, and the highest levels of risk often directly dependent on uncontrollable variables such as the weather and the economy. In summary, this crisis is about to create a ripple effect that will place both those most vulnerable and those serving them at risk. Which brings us to the question: how can we increase our [resiliency](#) in this time of crisis?

First, we should all regularly review the [recommendations directly from the CDC](#) including testing, best practices, and posters.

Second, it is important that we spend time learning how we can [take care of ourselves as individuals first](#), including accessing healthcare through tele-health programs when possible (in Charleston, MUSC is providing [tele-health coronavirus screenings](#) with promo code "COVID19"). Third, keep an eye on information [mapping the spread of this virus](#) (but honestly, it is just pretty depressing). And finally, we all could use some good old fashion advice from an [Italian Grandma](#) or some heart warming [community singing](#) to lift our spirits. Now that the basics are covered, we can dig in to the tactical aspects of this challenge.

Resources for the front lines

To all the nonprofit leaders out there (and social impact businesses a like), if there is one thing that our industry is capable of, it is acting quickly on a tight budget with a spirit of collaboration. So many organizations have pulled together incredible tools/resources shared below. Together SC created this incredible post: ["What to do if the Coronavirus comes to call"](#) that outlines a thought process as well as shares tools. Resources range from internal operation considerations, communication strategies to recommendations on ["shoring up financial reserves"](#) and considerations around [discrimination relating to the virus](#). You can also check out [risk management tools for your team](#), tools on [what your board should be doing during this time](#) and how to [handle cancelling an event](#). As employers it is also important to keep up to date with the [fair labor standards](#) and [unemployment](#) policies during this time (also check your local [Department of Employment](#)). Lowcountry Local First advocates for local businesses (including farmers) in South Carolina and has already begun gathering feedback from their members through this [survey](#) to collect and [share ideas for weathering this storm and supporting local businesses and farmers safely during this crisis](#). If you are looking for an active nonprofit Facebook community, check out the Nonprofit Happy Hour [official COVID Development Teams thread](#).

LISTS OF LISTS: [HEAL Food Alliance](#) have created [robust working documents full of resources](#) as well as [Food & Land Sovereignty Resource List for COVID-19](#) (compiled by Soul Fire Farm, Black Farmer Fund, and Northeast Farmers of Color). The National Council of Nonprofits includes resources in addition to those above ["Nonprofits and Coronavirus, COVID-19"](#). The [Restaurant Workers Community Foundation](#) list includes information and resources for restaurants and workers. The National Center for Family Philanthropy has [compiled a list of funding](#) that includes this [incredible map of local funding across the nation](#).

FUNDING: Step one, see above. In addition to the robust list of funding sources above, you can also [Apply for Disaster Assistance Loans for Small Businesses Impacted by Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#) through the Small Business Administration (SBA). Food Access groups can apply for [funding in support of youth food access programming](#). If you are prior Crossroads funding recipient, you can [apply for additional support](#).

BRAINSTORMING: Winrock is hosting a Food Policy Council [Roundtable Discussion on March 20th](#). Forefront is hosting a webinar on [How to navigate the financial risks](#)

[during COVID-19](#) on March 23 @ 2:00 pm - 3:30 pm CDT. There is also an [Adapting your fundraising strategy](#) Thursday, March 26, 2020 from 2:00PM - 3:00PM PST.

FOOD ACCESS groups, as noted above can now apply for [funding in support of youth food access programming](#). USDA proposed [a number of changes to school meal programs](#) - comment period ends March 23, 2020. There is also this helpful handout on [where and how to donate food](#) that can be shared with your networks. Eat Smart Move More SC created best practices on [how to safely distribute food](#) using grab-and-go and other distributions techniques.

COMMUNICATION TOOLS: As we all begin the process of social distancing, quarantines, and in some cases, sheltering in place, we will rely more heavily on digital communication tools. As someone that already works from home, I can say that there are an array of choices. Google and Microsoft are offering their [conferencing tools free-of-charge](#) for a limited time. [Slack's free version](#) is very robust and I highly recommend it for teams or collaborations, including industry collaborations (ex. area Food Banks coordinating). GoToMeeting is also offering their [remote work tools free](#) for three months. Zoom has a [free option](#), just get ready for that 40 minute meeting cut-off. If you are like me and have to worry about the occasional baby cry or kiddo interrupting your call (we've all [seen the video](#)), I personally have gotten creative by adapting a little video conferencing space in my closet and when necessary taking calls in my car in the driveway.

To my farming friends, you are not alone and there are entire networks of food system leaders working hard to come up with solutions, including the [National Good Food Network](#) who dedicated an entire session to this process at their conference last week and have already created a COVID-19 Response Team [listserv](#) and [working document](#). The [National Young Farmers Coalition](#) also has an array of resources to stay connected and in touch, including a [survey](#) to find out what your needs are. If the thought of another tough season has you feeling completely overwhelmed, there are farmer [crisis hotlines available](#) including Farm Aid at 1-800-FARM-AID (1-800-327-6243), the [RAFI-USA](#) hotline 919-542-1396 and press #1 for the Farmer Crisis Hotline or toll-free at 866-586-6746 or the suicide prevention hotline at 1-800-273-8255 ([online chat](#) also available). You also find [general disaster resources here](#) and many state farm organizations, such as the [Carolina Farm Stewardship Association](#) (NC and SC) and [The Food Well Alliance](#) (ATL) have pulled together additional resources. As we all know, the spring season is often the most profitable for farmers selling direct to consumer and with market closures and the downturn in the economy, now is not the time to have an abundance of supply and no way to connect with the demand.

The most comprehensive and pro-active measures I have seen are those taken by [4PFoods](#) in Virginia, as outlined in the following [case statement](#). The overall message: We have to quickly shift the flow in our supply chain by directing food traditionally sold into farmers markets and restaurants and instead focus on selling to customers using home delivery services, redistributing to food banks and school feeding programs. This process includes leveraging the schools buses not currently in operation, cold storage that is currently empty, food service workers without jobs, and above all- gaining financial investments from the public and private sector to implement these strategies.

So what can farmers do in the immediate future? *Here are some ideas:*

- Make sure you have contact information for your customers so you can communicate with them, keep them informed on social media, and outline what steps you are taking to protect your products and workers (washable containers, gloves, masks, social distancing, general [food safety practices](#)). If you are a U-pick operation, there are even resources to [build your own wash station](#).
- Reach out to your [local food hub](#) to see if they have the capacity to buy your product or if they are aware of any processors able to process, dehydrate, and/or freeze as well as provide storage.
- Connect with home [CSA Delivery Farms](#) and CSA/Box Services to see if they are able to buy and sell your products.
- Create your own pre-packed boxes for customers and develop curbside pick-up or delivery. There are a variety of softwares out there [Local Food Marketplace](#), [Farmigo](#), [Barn2Door](#), [CSA Member Assembler](#), [CSAware](#), [HarvestHand](#), [The CSA Toolbox](#) and soooo many more. You can also [check out the recorded webinar](#) from Oregon Tilth on this topic for resources and support.
- Consider making value added products with pre-approved recipes (remember, you will have to go through proper channels in your state to meet the processing requirements- examples resources from [CA](#) and [NC](#)) and/or working with companies that can do this for you. You may even know of chefs in your area that would like to partner on products that they can use in their kitchens when business picks back up.
- Market the fact that there are great health and immunity benefits of fresh fruits and veggies (ex. high vitamin C in berries and broccoli) as well as sharing recipes for immune boosters like [fire cider](#).
- Encouraging customers to buy and bulk and [freeze](#) in case of quarantine.
- Sell gift cards that customers can cash in later on in the year.

- Reach out to your local food bank to see if they have the capacity or resources to purchase product. If you simply are not able to harvest, you can also see if they have any groups interested in gleaning.
- For the farmers markets that have remained open, here is a good example of [how a market in NC](#) is making an effort to reduce exposure. Also see below on the campaign for **#farmersmarketsaregrocerystores**
- Check out this great post from RAFI-USA on [alternative sales options for direct to market farmers](#).

Advocating for support

Beyond keeping the operations running, we will all have a role to play in advocating for policies and relief packages that take the broader food system as well as [nonprofits](#) into consideration. Much of the work will need to be done at a state and regional level, just as the folks at 4PFoods. It has been indicated that agriculture is considered "[Critical Infrastructure](#)" but there are a lot of questions about where activities around food access and farmers markets will fall in these definitions.

There is currently a campaign from the National Young Farmers Coalition [to urge members of congress to include farmers in their relief packages](#) and you can also sign up for [action alerts](#).

[Carolina Farm Stewardship Association](#) and allied organizations have assembled [an advocacy toolkit to help communities fight to keep their markets open](#), and to re-open markets that have been wrongly closed.

"The toolkit includes a link to *COVID-19 Operational Guidelines and Tips for Farmers Markets*, which provides information on social distancing and sanitation practices that should be implemented at markets to maintain public health. It also includes resources to use when convincing local authorities to allow markets to continue and advocacy strategies to generate public support for the issue in your community. **Please share these resources with the hashtag #farmersmarketsaregrocerystores.**"

The team at Local Progress has pulled together a number of recommendations and actions highlighting the need for [advocacy around equity](#) during this time.

At the end of the day, we all have the opportunity to support our local farmers and reach out to nonprofits in our community to find opportunities to help, even from the safety of our homes. I hope we can use this time to cherish those we love, spend more time

outdoors connecting with nature, and leverage this as a catalyst towards building a more resilient local food system.