

March 31, 2021

Administrator Bruce Summers
Agricultural Marketing Service
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20228

Dear Administrator Summers,

We write today to submit comments on behalf of farmers and stakeholders in our state on how we can better implement food purchase and donation programs that are intended to help those struggling with food insecurity. We appreciate the opportunity to offer these suggestions on behalf of farmers and families in our state.

While farmers in our state wanted to participate in the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farmer to Family Food Box Program, they struggled to gain access and secure contracts under the program's requirements. A few Connecticut entities received contracts in the first funding solicitations of Farmer to Family Food Box, but the program changed in later rounds and farmers in our state were unable to participate. Therefore, we suggest that any new program USDA creates prioritize: (1) small and mid-sized farmers through awarding additional small contracts and sub-contracts; (2) vendors that commit to source local products, particularly products from minority or women-owned businesses and (3) vendors that had to lay off workers but make a commitment to rehiring those workers if awarded a contract.

A new USDA program should change program requirements to facilitate participation by food banks. The Farmer to Family Food Box program must be commended for rapidly responding to a food insecurity crisis. As of January, 2021, the program distributed 132.7 million boxes of food, which were a critical lifeline for millions of families across the country.¹ However, the program had stringent requirements on box contents. Any new program should ensure food provided to those in need better aligns with consumer's dietary and cultural preferences. In addition, the requirement that food be packaged in boxes was a challenge for food banks. As a report by the National Coalition on Sustainable Agriculture and the Food Law and Policy Clinic at Harvard Law School notes, "the Program dictated that distributors deliver the food in boxes or in pallets of boxes, despite the fact that many food banks prefer and most efficiently process food stored on pallets"². The program could be further improved by requiring vendors to include bi-lingual information on how recipients can apply for other federal and state assistance programs.

Finally, the contracts between the USDA and the participating entity should provide more time between when contracts are announced and when delivery periods begin in order to allow vendors to properly source product. This is particularly important for small and medium-sized

¹ Emily M. Broad Leib, Ariel Ardura, Joseph Bechmann, "An Evaluation of the Farmers to Families Food Box Program," National Coalition on Sustainable Agriculture and Food Law and Policy Clinic at Harvard Law School," February 2021.

² Ibid.

producers. Second, the contract period should be clearly defined and potentially lengthened so vendors have a clear expectation of how long the program will last.

We appreciate all the efforts of the USDA to help farmers and those struggling with food insecurity during this pandemic. We look forward to working with you further on these issues.

Sincerely,



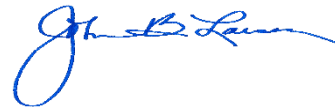
Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



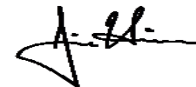
Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress



John B. Larson
Member of Congress



Joe Courtney
Member of Congress



Jim Himes
Member of Congress



Jahana Hayes
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