

July 21, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leaders McConnell and Schumer:

As representatives of organizations that support the specialty crop agriculture industry, grocers, and public health, we seek your support for \$51 million in emergency funding for the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program in response to the burgeoning needs of farmers, local grocers, food insecure families, and local economies across the country.

The 2018 Farm Bill expanded the Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) program, known now as the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP), because of significant bi-partisan support for the program's benefits to specialty crop farmers, grocers, food insecure families, and the communities in which they reside. GusNIP increases the purchasing power of SNAP recipients when they buy healthy fruits and vegetables at participating grocery stores and farmers markets by leveraging financial incentives like discounts, coupons, and loyalty rewards. We write in support of providing the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) with \$51 million in emergency COVID-19 relief funding to both decrease the required non-federal match funding and to meet surging program demand.

GusNIP is a competitive USDA grant that requires grantees to secure half their funding through state budget appropriations and philanthropic sources. Both have shrunk due to the pandemic, at a time of exponential need.

Fruit and vegetable producers across the country are facing significant financial stress as the pandemic disrupts normal channels of business, especially sales to institutional and food service buyers. Total economic losses of \$1.3 billion are forecast in local and regional markets, during March through May 2020 alone.

Specific estimates are unavailable for how many of the newly unemployed are food insecure, however, there are staggering statistics that help illustrate the growing need across the country. As of July 2, the U.S. Department of Labor reports over 12 million workers are newly unemployed since February 2020, and USDA has approved Pandemic-EBT in all 50 states. The latter reflects the needs of school children, whereas across the country, prior to schools closing, approximately 21 million received free and reduced-price school meals daily. The Brookings Institution's Hamilton Project recently analyzed new weekly U.S. Census Bureau data that indicate as many as 14 million of these children, approximately 16.5 percent of households with children under the age of 18, are currently not getting enough to eat.

GusNIP stretches families' food budgets, incentivizes healthier options and stimulates the economy. Without an emergency increase, GusNIP grantees will be faced with exhausted funding exactly at the time they are most needed in the recovery phase of the pandemic. We urge Congress to expand USDA's match at this critically important time by providing \$51 million in emergency funding into this effective nutrition incentive program.

Sincerely,

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
Farm Credit Council
National Association of State Departments of Agriculture
National Grocers Association
National Potato Council
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
Produce Marketing Association
U.S. Apple Association

Cc: Senate Agriculture Committee; Chairman Pat Roberts
Senate Agriculture Committee; Ranking Member Debbie Stabenow
Senate Appropriations Committee; Chairman Richard Shelby
Senate Appropriations Committee; Ranking Member Patrick Leahy