



— SAFSF 2021 —

# SUCCESS STORIES FROM THE FIELD

**OUR MISSION IS TO AMPLIFY THE IMPACT OF PHILANTHROPIC AND INVESTMENT COMMUNITIES, IN SUPPORT OF JUST AND SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SYSTEMS.**

*(Photo Credit: North Coast Growers Association)*

Farmers and providers have adapted to create new programs with state and federal backing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The coronavirus pandemic made it impossible for anyone in America to ignore the problems in our country’s agriculture and food system. The problems that emerged were not new, but the ripple effects of the pandemic exacerbated existing problems to the point where it created serious threats to the ability of everyday people to feed themselves and their families.

The members and network of Sustainable Agriculture and Food System Funders (SAFSF) shared and learned through the pandemic experience about how philanthropy and government – working both independently and in concert – can move quickly to address food-related crises. We believe this is a pivotal moment

to take what we have learned from the challenges of 2020 and use it to strengthen and reimagine a nationwide agriculture and food system where local and regional infrastructure is effectively supported by state and federal policies and funding, coupled with philanthropic engagement and resources.

The stories shared capture a few examples of how small farmers, farmers’ markets, distributors, small businesses and philanthropy collaborated and engaged through federal and state programs to support food access and food security, to mitigate climate change, and to invest local economies either in response to the pandemic or in preparation for the resilience which we know will be needed to weather future crises.

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# PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS CONTINUE TO STRENGTHEN LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS IN NEW MEXICO

The importance of local and regional food systems has never been more apparent than in 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic severely disrupted food supply chains throughout the globe. Moreover, COVID also laid bare the many vulnerabilities and inequities in our food systems – both worldwide as well as in the state of New Mexico. At the same time, food and agriculture supporters in New Mexico find themselves at a place of collective and strategic alignment, an important stage in terms of these partners’ individual and collective evolution.

For these reasons, the inaugural funding provided in 2020 for the **USDA Regional Food System Partnerships (RFSP)** program could not have come at a more opportune time, as this initiative supports the planning and development of more resilient local or regional food systems.

The **New Mexico Farmers’ Marketing Association (NMFMA)**’s “Scaling Up New Mexico’s Value Chain Coordination (VCC) Network” grant was one of 10 awards the **United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)** provided nationwide for an RFSP Implementation and Expansion project. Over the next three years, the NMFMA will strengthen and build upon successful public and private collaborations to develop the long-term economic viability of the state’s agricultural producers, while providing increased consumer access to healthy, local food – especially for lower-income populations. The project is building upon collaborations that have been in development over the past decade (and longer in some cases) among a wide variety of stakeholders – including farmers, food hubs, state government agency buyers, distributors, and more – across the food value chain. By the project’s end, the NM VCC Network will benefit from newly developed shared resources, enhanced relationships, and improved data and management systems for institutional and other wholesale



(Photo Credit: New Mexico Farmers’ Marketing Association)

The New Mexico Farmers’ Marketing Association received one of 10 grants awarded by the United States Department of Agriculture for a Regional Food System Partnership project.

procurement, all of which will increase local market opportunities for producers.

The USDA RFSP grant also benefits from contributions from local philanthropic partners, as the forthcoming work will build upon and further scale VCC efforts that have been co-funded by philanthropy and federal sources over the past several years. In addition, the \$1 million RFSP award required a 25% cash match which would not have been possible without multi-year local foundation funding.



## PACKED PRODUCE BOX PROGRAMS REACH NEW CUSTOMERS WITH MARKET MATCH

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a handful of farmers' markets across California began offering packed produce boxes available for online ordering.

Using **Market Match**, California's healthy food incentive program, **SNAP** customers received a 50% discount on a produce box.

Market Match is supported through the **Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentives Program (GusNIP)** and matches customers' federal nutrition assistance benefits at farmers' markets and other farm-direct sites.

Angie Warkentin, a manager at Visalia Farmers' Market, said, "We are reaching a whole new customer base with the packed produce box program."

One customer added, "The Visalia Farmers' Market online drive-thru box program made it safe and easy to get fresh produce without any worries. It's very important for my family and me to have local produce, especially during this uncertain time."

The market's box program continues to grow week after week and can service customers in a completely contactless way.

Market Match also helped families feed schoolchildren. In the spring, California families with children enrolled in the national school lunch program received **Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT)** funds. P-EBT was accepted



(Photo Credit: Visalia Farmers' Market)

Packed produce boxes are now available in California for online ordering.

at farmers' markets across the state and matched with Market Match.

The Visalia Farmers' Market customer said, "Being able to save some money when using our P-EBT card on produce is a huge plus, and the funds will last us longer by shopping at the farmers' market."

## COVID-19 RESPONSE GUIDE OFFERS OPTIONS FOR FARMERS' MARKETS

At the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, the **California Alliance of Farmers' Markets** quickly created a COVID-19 Farmers' Market Response and Best Practices guide.

This guide was pushed through because of the need for best practices that farmers' markets could follow to ensure they stay safe, open and abide by social distancing regulations.

The guide was supported by **Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP)** funding. The Alliance's guide uses the **California Department of Public Health's (CDPH)** guidance for farmers' markets as its foundation.

Each CDPH guideline is followed by a bulleted list of practices being used at markets across the state. Also, some best

practices follow the Bay Area shelter-in-place "Social Distancing Protocol", built upon by the **Ecology Center**.

Not every practice will work for an individual market's needs, given the unique layouts and operations of California's farmers' markets, but the guide pulls together a myriad of approaches as a menu of options and ideas. Since its release, farmers' markets across the state, and nationally, have expressed gratitude for this resource.

FMPP funding has also enabled the Alliance to facilitate/co-facilitate the following webinars:

- Practices at Farmers' Markets in Response to COVID-19 (April 2020)
- Box Programs at Farmers' Markets due to COVID-19 (May 2020)
- Thinking Inside the Box - Making

healthy food accessible using curbside/drive-thru (contactless) models at Farmers' Markets during COVID-19 (Sept 2020)

These resources can be found at <https://farmersmarketalliance.org/trainings/>

The Alliance is a member-based coalition of certified farmers' markets, farmers, and affiliate partners dedicated to promoting the direct farmer-to-consumer relationship. It supports California's independent farmers and increases access to fresh, healthy, locally-grown food.

The Alliance represents certified farmers' markets throughout California and works to ensure local and state regulations strengthen the farmers' market industry. It is led and convened by the Berkeley-based Ecology Center.



# THE COMMON MARKET BOOSTS FARMS AND CONSUMERS WITH MORE THAN 820,000 DELIVERIES

The Common Market is a multi-regional nonprofit with a mission to connect communities with good food from sustainable family farms in the Mid-Atlantic, Southeast and Texas. Historically, most of The Common Market's food deliveries went to schools, hospitals, eldercare, stadiums, and corrections facilities, through partnerships with food service management companies that maintain contracts with institutional kitchens. Once the pandemic took hold, these institutional markets began shutting down.

To keep its commitments to farmers as much as possible, as well as serve communities in need, The Common Market entered into the USDA Farmers to Families Food Box Program (F2F) to use its existing social and physical infrastructure to alleviate the economic and health trauma caused by the crisis. The F2F program provided a crucial safety net to small and mid-sized farmers by buying their healthy products at fair market prices, while covering the costs of procurement and community distribution for organizations like The Common Market. Participation forestalled laying off staff, created 120 new jobs, kept partner farms viable, and provided high-quality, household-sized, culturally appropriate food boxes for 250 communities throughout the Mid-Atlantic and Southeast regions.

The impact of F2F for The Common Market was substantial. From May through September of 2020, The Common Market contracts totaled \$16.2 million, which allowed them to:

- Deliver 829,453 healthy produce and dairy boxes through 2,782 deliveries to 295 locations across the Mid-Atlantic and Southeast
- Partner with 134 agencies
- Purchase \$9.8 million worth of farm fresh goods from 53 producers across seven states

The demand for The Common Market's services - high-quality, healthy food from family farms delivered - has never been greater. They have served tens of thousands of food-insecure families throughout these regions, thanks to new partnerships with government agencies at the federal and local levels through programs like the F2F.



## ELLIJAY MUSHROOMS, ELLIJAY, GA

"For farmers, it's been a win-win – providing support for those in need while also providing an opportunity to keep farms afloat. The Common Market has given us a lifeline in these uncertain times with the opportunity to supply our mushrooms in the USDA farm boxes."

—Howard Berk, Owner/Farmer

## FRECON FRUIT FARMS, BOYERTOWN, PA

"Our partnership with The Common Market has been a lifeline for our farm during the crisis. The impact to our wholesale business was immediate and shocking. The Common Market partnership helps keep our farm viable, kept employees working while millions of Americans were unemployed, and distributed our fruit to those in need. This is why we farm."

—Steven P. Frecon, Owner & General Manager



## F2F POSITIVE PROGRAM APPROACHES - ROUNDS 1 & 2 WINS

1. **Quick Congressional and USDA action** to create the program and get food out of fields and to the families who need it.
2. **Commitment to purchasing from small & mid-sized producers** to keep them financially viable – recognition of these producers' vital role in regional food economies.
3. **Commitment to paying fair prices** to producers.
4. **Emphasis on distributing food within the region** it was produced in as much as possible.
5. **Willingness to contract with organizations and companies of different sizes** – maintaining crucial supply chain partnerships for local and regional food economies and providing efficient distribution to hard-to-reach communities.
6. **Ability to contract for different kinds of food boxes** to meet needs of communities and recipients.

Here are two reports from other organizations in the field that examine the program and provide recommendations to ensure that regionally focused, community-based organizations like The Common Market can continue to participate.

- [An Evaluation of the Farmers to Families Food Box Program](#) by the Food Law and Policy Clinic at Harvard Law School and the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
- [Farmers to Families Food Box Research Findings](#) by the Wallace Center at Winrock International.

# EFOD WORKS WITH VIRGINIA ON EQUITY-BASED RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUNDING

Equitable Food Oriented Development (EFOD) is a development strategy that uses food and agriculture to create economic opportunities, healthy neighborhoods, and explicitly seeks to build community assets, pride, and power by and with historically marginalized communities. Through a partnership facilitated by **Sustainable Agriculture and Food System Funders (SAFSF)**, the **Equitable Food Oriented Development (EFOD) Collaborative**, a national coalition of EFOD organizations and leaders, recently worked with the **Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS)** to create equity-based recommendations for the new **Virginia Food Access Investment Fund (VFAIF)**, resulting in first-of-its-kind legislation that provides a model for grounded, equity-based state policy partnerships for financing.

The legislation establishing the fund also created an EFOD Stakeholder Workgroup. The EFOD Steering Committee, a group of field-leading practitioner-activists, joined the kickoff meeting of the VFAIF Stakeholder Workgroup to create a shared understanding of EFOD principles and key ideas of how those principles could inform the design and implementation of the VFAIF.

Initial meetings with the Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Agriculture, Dr. Jewel Bronaugh, and her staff focused on mutual learning and understanding from the EFOD Brown Paper, which the commissioner held up as a key tool and subsequently shared with VDACS staff and VFAIF stakeholder workgroup members. The Commissioner consulted the EFOD Steering Committee on selecting a Community Development Finance Institution to partner with VDACS, as well as EFOD-based hiring strategies for VFAIF coordination staff.



(Photo Credit: Equitable Food Oriented Development)

The Equitable Food Oriented Development Collaborative has helped Virginia develop new legislation for state policy partnerships for financing.

EFOD leaders were engaged to provide feedback and help integrate EFOD principles into the VFAIF program description and proposal evaluation guidelines, which resulted in the first EFOD-aligned state-level program in the country.



Dr. Jewel Bronaugh

“We have been excited by the commitment to utilize EFOD guidelines to steer the design and implementation of Virginia’s Food Access Investment Fund. It was an honor to participate,” says Jeanette Abi-Nader, executive director of Cultivate Charlottesville, and a member of the VFAIF Stakeholder Workgroup. “By centering equity and including stakeholders engaged in the work, the Virginia legislation established an

important baseline. Maintaining this focus throughout implementation will require rigor and ongoing commitment to EFOD practices and evaluation.”

Work to fully integrate the EFOD framework into the rollout of the Virginia fund is still in progress, and the EFOD Collaborative looks forward to continued support and the spread of such partnerships to other states. This rollout has underscored how important it is to integrate EFOD principles of decision-making when designing a funding program, to build on the legacy of EFOD practitioner leadership. Those principles inspired the EFOD Fund, which supports community-based EFOD organizations that may not have access to state financing resources. The EFOD Fund is an emerging community investment fund designed to support capital-intensive EFOD initiatives through a democratically-controlled financing option. Learn more at [efod.org](http://efod.org).

# FARMERS MARKET COALITION PUSHED STATES TO LIST MARKETS AS ESSENTIAL SERVICES

As the COVID-19 pandemic spread, many markets redesigned their physical market space to allow for appropriate social distancing measures. Others omitted walk-up services completely in favor of online and curbside pickup or delivery models.

State policies around declaring markets essential and providing guidance have been critical to the ability of markets to open and stay open. **Farmers Market Coalition (FMC)** worked with state farmers' market associations and departments of agriculture to push for farmers' markets to be listed as essential services. Support from state departments of agriculture was often the difference-maker for farmers' markets being specifically identified as essential services.

FMC utilized funding from the **USDA AMS Local Food Systems Response to COVID-19 Project** and the **Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP)** to quickly develop new guidelines, toolkits, webinars, and other resources to assist farmers' market operators in pivoting their operations to continue to provide outlets for producers and food access to communities safely.

FMC is a national 501(c)(3) non-profit dedicated to strengthening farmers' markets across the United States so that they can serve as community assets and provide real income opportunities for farmers. FMC provides support and resources to farmers' market operators, organizations, state associations, building and maintaining a national network of leaders around local food systems and farmers' markets.

The USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) Local Food Systems Response to COVID-19 project, led by a University of Kentucky cooperating research team, supports Local and Regional Food System (LRFS)



(Photo Credit: Farmers Market Coalition)

The Farmers Market Coalition has helped farmers' market associations remain open through pushing state departments of agriculture to list them as essential services.

communities of practice by documenting and disseminating innovations and best practices developed on the ground. The project also draws on LRFS thought leaders to frame research on COVID-related shifts in LRFS markets to support long term resilience.

GusNIP is a four-year effort funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture through the 2018 Farm Bill. The Nutrition Incentive Hub was created to provide training, technical assistance, reporting, and evaluation support to GusNIP grantees toward the intended impact of increasing the purchase of fruits and vegetables by the SNAP incentive program and produce prescription project participants. The

Farm Direct Team of The Hub includes the Farmers Market Coalition with subcontractors Ecology Center and Michigan Farmers' Market Association.

Funding from this contract was vital to providing technical support and assistance to farmers' market operators and farm-direct retailers implementing nutrition incentive programs throughout the pandemic. The development of educational webinars, communities of practice, working groups, and collections of resources helped farmers' markets and farm-direct retailers to pivot and continue to operate and feed their communities in an unprecedented crisis.



# POP UP FOOD HUB GATHERING FROM MARKETS AND DISTRIBUTING TO MARGINALIZED PEOPLE

With support from the **United States Department of Agriculture AMS Local Food Promotion Program**, FRESHFARM's **Pop Up Food Hub** is an innovative, low-infrastructure model of local food distribution. It delivers healthy, affordable produce to early childcare centers, health clinics, senior centers, school programs, and more.

The Pop Up Food Hub is unique from other local food distribution programs in that it uses farmers' markets as a center to gather produce, rather than warehousing. This keeps overhead costs low and allows FRESHFARM to reach marginalized clients at more affordable prices.

Since the COVID-19 public health emergency began, FRESHFARM has rapidly scaled the Pop Up Food Hub distribution program to connect the local food supply to vulnerable residents. They have shifted from fee-based to a free distribution model for low-income families, and from pick-up to direct home delivery.

Through September of 2020, the Pop Up Food Hub delivered over 17,000 bags of healthy, local produce to vulnerable and low-income communities, equal to more than 325,000 servings of fruits and vegetables. These bags generated over \$400,000 in additional revenue for local farmers.

They are also selling wholesale produce at zero markups to food pantries and nonprofit meal services because the availability of fresh produce is minimal. With national food supply chains breaking down, their local system of food distribution was able to expand its services to fill the gap during the pandemic. They have also expanded into new areas, such as Arlington and Fairfax counties in Virginia.

By sourcing from local farms, FRESHFARM is not only able to secure the highest quality, fresh produce for vulnerable families, but is also able to support another at-risk population:



(Photo Credits: FRESHFARM)

FRESHFARM's Pop Up Food Hub uses farmers' markets to gather produce for vulnerable residents.



independent family farmers.

The farmers who make up their network generally rely on direct-to-consumer sales via farmers' markets and have few wholesale, distributor, or restaurant accounts. Social distancing measures and shelter-in-place orders stand to compromise retail activity at farmers' markets.

Many farmers have shifted operations to online distribution, but this does not come close to matching the sales volume on a typical day at the market.

What's more, farmers have forgone

income for most of the winter season, all while investing thousands of dollars into growing for the opening of market season in April.

At this critical moment, these producers need to access consumers through supportive new channels to recover their investments and keep the farm solvent.

By gathering products from multiple vendors, FRESHFARM can support producers who may experience hardship from the COVID-19 crisis, while also ensuring families have a wide variety of products in their weekly deliveries.

# CALIFORNIA HEALTHY SOILS PROGRAM SETS RECORDS FOR APPLICATIONS AND FUNDING

The state-funded **California Healthy Soils Program** received more than 600 applications during an application period that opened just a couple of weeks before state-wide shutdowns. The record applications came during a record year of funding, which allowed many farmers to mitigate climate change on their farms, while also investing in local economies.

The Boonville Barn Collective in the Anderson Valley is a great example. After losing 80% of their market due to COVID-19 related restaurant closures and scrambling to shift primarily wholesale markets to direct-to-consumer, their healthy soils grant was awarded. With this grant, they will establish a hedgerow of native plants. This is an investment in the future of their farm by building soil health, reducing pesticide drift and dust from nearby wineries and roads, and increasing pollinator habitat. It also supports the local economy because they'll spend most of the grant money on native plants from a nearby nursery.

Funds for the California Healthy Soils Program come from the **Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund** and natural resources bonds and are administered through the **California Department of Food and Agriculture**.

**California Climate & Agriculture Network (CalCAN)**, a statewide coalition that advances policy to realize climate solutions offered by sustainable and organic agriculture, indicates how the Healthy Soils Program is only one of several state programs that provide incentives for farmers and ranchers to adopt climate-smart practices. All of these programs have been extremely popular among producers, and CalCAN consistently convenes working groups that include the farmers and ranchers directly impacted to discuss improvements needed for the Healthy Soils Program to amplify its impact.



*(Photo Credit: Gilbert Bages)*

Nacho Flores of Boonville Farm Collective.



# WHEN A PANDEMIC RESPONSE WAS NEEDED, HAWAII'S PRIVATE-SECTOR FUNDERS STEPPED FORWARD

In Hawaii as in other states across the nation, local and state agencies were stretched to their limits in responding to the daily needs before them as the COVID-19 pandemic hit and expanded. Private philanthropy stepped forward in many ways to help bridge gaps and leverage the resources available to island state's communities in need.

As the most isolated, populated land mass in the world, Hawaii imports 80-90% of its food and relies heavily on just-in-time delivery, leaving it uniquely vulnerable to global supply chain disruptions. At the same time, the Hawaii Department of Agriculture estimated that Hawaii farmers lost 50% of their market nearly overnight, as restaurants closed and the state's dominant tourism industry ground to a halt.

Through the Ulupono Fund at the Hawaii Community Foundation, impact investment firm Ulupono Initiative provided more than \$470,000 in grant support to the Hawaii Farm Bureau Foundation in 2020 to aid the bureau's efforts to support island farmers as well as the non-profit organizations that purchase food from those farmers. In total, the Ulupono Fund awarded more than \$1.8 million in grants to local agriculture- and food-related organizations in 2020.

Perhaps even more important was the Ulupono team's work to create new relationships between agricultural



(Photo Credit: The Food Basket)

Doubling up SNAP benefits, called Double Up Food Bucks, has been called a "triple win" by Hawaii Governor David Ige.

producers and other stakeholders within the severely disrupted food distribution network in order to adapt to the crisis.

For example, the Hawaii Foodbank which had spent \$400,000 on all its food purchases in 2019, depending heavily on donations from grocers and distributors and making zero purchases from local farmers, spent more than \$2 million on local farm products in 2020. Grant funds provided through the Ulupono Fund enabled the Hawaii Foodbank to expand staff resources to manage purchasing, inventory and procurement of food

products from local farmers, working through the Hawaii Farm Bureau to purchase tens of thousands of pounds of local bok choy, sweet potato, long beans, squash, bananas, watercress, avocado, and more.

The "DA BUX" Double Up Food Bucks program, which doubles the value of federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits spent on local produce at participating retail grocers, presented an opportunity for a replicable model of private-public partnership in support of Hawaiians facing ongoing food insecurity.

The Stupski Foundation, Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, and Kamehameha Schools were among the private funders who joined Ulupono Initiative in proposing the state use federal CARES Act Relief Funds to match their half-million dollar donation to DA BUX. Gov. David Ige accepted, resulting in \$1 million becoming available for SNAP recipients to purchase locally produced, fresh and nutritious fruits, vegetables and proteins at participating locations statewide.

Gov. Ige called it a "triple-win solution because it supports local farmers with an increased customer base, low-income families who receive double the purchasing power for healthy, Hawaii-grown produce, and our entire community by keeping dollars in the local economy."

The Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems Funders would like to thank the following collaborating organizations who provided their stories:

- [California Climate and Agriculture Network](#)
- [The Common Market](#)
- [DAISA Enterprises](#)
- [Farmers Market Coalition](#)
- [FRESHFARM](#)
- [Ecology Center](#)
- [Thornburg Foundation](#)
- [Ulupono Initiative](#)

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