



CHELLIE PINGREE
CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
1ST DISTRICT, MAINE

March 16, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, U.S. Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi,

Thank you for your steadfast leadership during these difficult times. I am writing to express my concerns about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on farmers who market products in local and regional markets.

As consumer interest in food production has grown significantly in recent years, so too has the local and regional food economy. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), direct-to-consumer food sales in the U.S. totaled \$2.8 billion in 2017. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic is already negatively impacting local and regional food markets and prompting unexpected financial hardship among farmers.

In Maine, we have a robust network of indoor winter farmers' markets that are ongoing as the weather warms and outdoor farmers' markets come on line. In other parts of the country, outdoor farmers' markets are already in full swing. Social distancing and restrictions on public gatherings are decreasing attendance at farmers' markets and forcing some farmers' markets to close altogether. This jeopardizes a vital income source for farmers that sell their products directly to consumers. Additionally, farmers are losing institutional markets as schools and universities close their doors.

The Administration has provided more than \$23 billion to farmers since 2018 for the loss of export markets. Some districts, including my own, did not benefit from trade mitigation payments because it is more common for farmers to sell products through local and regional markets, not traditional commodity markets, and the trade mitigation payments only went to producers of a narrow list of commodity crops. I hope that as farmers lose local and regional markets due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we will make sure that these farmers, who predominantly grow specialty crops, are also supported.

We should provide emergency disaster payments to farmers selling fresh and minimally processed foods in local and regional markets that have been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Disaster payments could be made available for donating products to the emergency food system that would have otherwise been sold to institutions, such as schools and universities, or through direct marketing channels, such as farmers' markets. Additionally, we should ensure impacted farmers have access to USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) emergency farm loans, suspend FSA loan payments, and explore other ways to keep farmers in business. It will be critical to support USDA in conducting proactive outreach and utilize existing farm organizations so that farmers know what emergency assistance is available and how to access it.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter, and I look forward to working with you to support American farmers that have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Chellie Pingree". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress