

March 30th, 2020

# Denver Sustainable Food Policy Council



## Recommended actions regarding COVID-19 Impacts

As members of the Denver Sustainable Food Policy Council (SFPC), our mission is to influence policy that fosters food security for all community members and promotes a healthy, equitable, and sustainable local food system with consideration for economic vitality and environmental impact. Our purpose is to

- 1) Promote and Oversee Progress on the Denver Food Vision and The Food Action Plan;
- 2) Advise the City on Food-Related Plans, Reports, and Programs;
- 3) Provide Recommendations to the City on Regulations and Policies; and
- 4) Build public and political will to support innovation and positive policy changes within the food system.

We are farmers, food justice advocates, researchers, and non-profit food system workers collaborating and representing a wide diversity of the food system to provide targeted recommendations to the City for supporting the local food system, especially protecting the most impacted in our communities so that all groups have adequate access to food in their neighborhoods. **This memo is intended to pool our collective experience and expertise as council members to further recommendations that foster food security and justice for all during the COVID-19 crisis.**

## Focus on Justice

In the time of COVID-19, support for charitable efforts, including many food access efforts, is increasing. It's important that, while institutions and systems kick up their charitable efforts to provide emergency food relief and other immediate necessities, we also keep a focus on the long-term changes necessary to create a more just and resilient food system in Denver. The COVID-19 crisis is highlighting inequities and inadequacies in the food system. Denver needs a long-range sustainability plan for a larger share of food coming from local food production and with that, provisions valuing the corresponding work force—producers, servers, production and delivery workers, cooks, and managers. **A justice focus - in the midst of charitable efforts - aims to shift institutions and political structures that are holding long-standing inequities in place.**

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## Statement of Food System Needs

As the economy shuts down to slow the spread of coronavirus, the food system will see a number of impacts, and it's critical we begin to think about protections for the next few months now. People with low incomes will be hardest-hit by social-distancing measures, and most likely to have the chronic health conditions that increase their risk of severe infections. There are many small farmers and food hubs that will lose their markets, not to mention valuable food system workers who have been laid off or lost their income. As we see these changes, we're also seeing food access organizations (food banks, food pantries, non-profits) report serving 2-3X their normal number of clients.

## Actions/Policies underway that SFPC supports

- Confirming farmers markets and farm stands as essential business, along with other food providers, and part of the critical infrastructure that needs to remain open. While the Governor has already proclaimed this, we encourage DDPHE to work with market managers on policies that will ensure vendor and customer safety while encouraging customers to patronize farmers markets this season.
- Recognize Food Service workers as first tier emergency responders. Including: agricultural workers, food production, food delivery drivers, and food retail workers.
- Provide immediate, short-term financial relief for community food businesses whose demand has been disrupted by coronavirus containment efforts - make sure they are aware of the City's business grant relief program (the application and info needs to be in Spanish, and Vietnamese and Chinese).

## Recommended Actions/Policies in the near term (~2 weeks)

### Food System Infrastructure

- Map real-time data of food resources, areas of greatest need, and local farmers/producers/cooperatives that can be plugged into these efforts.
- Utilize established restaurants with kitchen space, cooler units, and/or storage to support the many emergency food services looking for extra space. Additionally, monitor & assist restaurants/markets with excess goods to move food where it's needed.
- Utilize school and other (RTD) bus drivers and vehicles for food deliveries.
- Designate a coordinating body to track deliveries connected to each distribution site (food banks, local non-profits, RNOs, Rec centers, etc.)

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- Support critically-needed semi tractor trailers/delivery drivers by keeping open truck stops, rest areas, and tire/mechanical repair shops in order for drivers to get rest, food, water, and repairs as needed.

#### Food System Workers

- Protect food system workers by providing gloves, masks, and personal protective equipment or installing physical barriers like plexiglass to keep them safe and our communities fed and healthy.
- Provide childcare support to food system workers so they can go to work

#### Food Assistance (SNAP-related)

- Make immediate changes in SNAP to redirect food distribution and allow online ordering and delivery
- Freeze changes to the Public Charge test that went into place February 24, 2020
- Approve States to operate a Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (D-SNAP) for households who may not normally qualify to assist temporarily food insecure households after a disaster (we're asking the Mayor to support advocacy at the federal level to make these changes).

#### Farmers/producers:

- Expand economic loss relief to include small specialty crop farmers
- Provide funding for food pantries and other emergency food access programs (i.e. meals) to purchase from farmers who have food they can't sell due to market disruptions, so that farmers can receive fair market value for their products
- Support to farmers for access to seeds/supplies (up front capital)

#### For small businesses:

- Direct support for food businesses that need emergency working loans - help them apply and qualify for the SBA Emergency Assistance Loans
- Eviction moratoriums, and/or deferment of mortgage/rent payments for food businesses (this way they can reopen when it's safe again)
- Do not increase the unemployment tax rate for businesses that have to layoff workers due to COVID-19 - we're asking the Mayor to lobby Governor Polis on this issue to help Denver businesses

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## Recommended Actions/Policies in the longer term (4-6 weeks)

- Protect food system workers against unfair termination or discrimination for those suspected of being exposed to the coronavirus
- Employ laid-off or unemployed workers to assist in emergency food system operations (preparation/packing, production, distribution, delivery).
- Convert public spaces to fill the critical need for extra food storage space. This may include engaging large gathering venues (eg., Pepsi Center, Convention Center). Also, while recreation centers are used as food distribution sites, existing elementary schools in high-need areas should be opened to access prep and/or storage. These spaces should be made available to allow local producers to store goods in determined sites.

This pandemic presents serious challenges, but also provides an opportunity to come together in solidarity, collaborate better through sharing information and coordinating resources, and strategize short-term solutions that will make us more resilient in the long term.

In collaboration,

Members of the Denver Sustainable Food Policy Council

Kristin Lacy  
Public Health Evaluator

Fatuma Emmad  
Frontline Farming

Helen Silver  
Soil Conservation Consultant

Doug Wooley  
Community Advocate

Brittany Pimentel  
Denver Urban Gardens

Meg Caley  
Sprout City Farms

Damien Thompson  
Regis University

Anne Misak  
Small Business Consultant

Reuben Gregory  
Children's Hospital Colorado

Ted Bellinger  
Ag Econ Consultant

Jenna Smith  
Dahlia Campus for Health & Well-Being

Kathryn Ardoin  
Growhaus

Mayra Olivas  
Re:Vision

Yuridia Bahena  
Re:Vision

Patti Iwasaki  
Community Advocate

Rayna Hetlage  
Community Advocate

Roberto Meza  
Emerald Gardens

Dan Goldhammer  
CSU Extension  
Ex-officio

Jennifer Mooreland  
Denver Health  
Ex-officio

Laine Cidlowski  
DDPHE  
Ex-officio

Valerie Herrera  
City Planning & Dev.

Lisana Munoz  
Denver Health & Human Services

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Ex-officio

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