

May 24, 2021

The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Secretary of Agriculture  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

As you know, the coronavirus pandemic has had substantial impacts on farm and food businesses across the nation, from farms and ranches to food hubs and processing facilities. Some saw their markets disappear overnight, requiring that they rapidly pivot to reach new customers, while others saw demand skyrocket beyond their capacity. The pandemic has underscored the need to better equip these businesses – especially those serving local and regional markets – to capitalize on new opportunities, create jobs, and achieve a more resilient food system.

Given this critical need, we are writing to urge the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to set aside \$300 million from the American Rescue Plan Act, to dramatically scale up one-on-one business technical assistance for small and mid-sized farm and food businesses. This type of investment into our future has a proven track record of improving regional supply chain resiliency. It will also translate into new wealth and opportunities, particularly for communities that the Biden administration has identified as underserved, including socially disadvantaged populations and low-income rural areas.

Farmers and ranchers are entrepreneurs as much as they are agricultural producers. This past year has demonstrated that improved business skills and financial literacy are essential to enabling these businesses to survive unforeseen market disruptions. For example, many small and mid-sized operations did not have the adequate financial recordkeeping needed to access coronavirus relief. Providing customized support in the form of one-to-one technical assistance – for financial coaching, business planning, market development, succession planning, and accessing land and capital – will create new jobs and expand profitability for both the current and next generation. One state program that provides tailored support and training found that two years of business planning support generated a 62 percent increase in net income, as well as added jobs at a rate three times that of the sector on average. This is just one example of what can be achieved nationally.

Through the American Rescue Plan Act, Congress provided an additional \$3.6 billion in funding to improve supply chain resiliency and help producers as well as small and mid-sized processors respond to the pandemic. Dedicating a portion of these funds to one-on-one business technical assistance is critical to meeting these goals. Currently, support for this assistance is being provided on a piecemeal basis across the country by public and NGO service providers who rely on inconsistent government and philanthropic funding sources. While the recent supplemental funding for USDA's Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP) and Farming Opportunities Training and Outreach (FOTO) represent critical investments in small and mid-sized farm and food businesses, these programs have a wide range of uses and are not specifically designed to support in-depth and sustained business technical assistance. In fact, a dedicated investment into business technical assistance will help ensure

the impact and longevity of these LAMP and FOTO investments. As such, we urge USDA to dedicate \$300 million for business technical assistance, delivered in the form of multi-year grants to public and NGO agricultural service providers with a history of providing this type of assistance and a track record of increasing business skills, profitability, and access to land and capital.

Thank you for your consideration of our request. We are grateful for the work you and the Department have done to support farms, ranches, and other food businesses as the pandemic continues.

Sincerely,

ACDS, LLC

Agricultural Viability Alliance

Alden Services

American Farmland Trust

Arcadia Center for Sustainable Food & Agriculture

Black Family Land Trust, Inc.

C2C - Farm and Ranch Business Education

The Carrot Project

Center for an Agricultural Economy

Chester County Economic Development Council

City Gardens

Coastal Enterprises, Inc (CEI)

Columbia Farmers Market

Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA)

Compeer Financial

Connecticut Farm Bureau Association

Connecticut Farmland Trust

Connecticut Food System Alliance

The Conservation Fund

Conservation Law Foundation

The Cooper Group, LLC

Cornell College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

Cornell Cooperative Extension CAAHP

The Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport

East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District

Eastern Market Partnership

Eastern Shore Land Conservancy

Elmina B. Sewall Foundation  
Fair Food Network  
Farm Commons  
Farm Credit East  
Food and Beverage Law Clinic, Elisabeth Haub School of Law at Pace University  
The Food Group  
Foodshed Capital  
Franklin County Community Development Corporation  
Glynwood Center for Regional Food and Farming  
GoFarm Hawaii  
The Good Acre  
The Greater Cumberland Committee (TGCC)  
Green Village Initiative  
Grounded Earth Farm  
Grow Food dba Viva Farms  
GrowNYC  
Harris-Pero & Botelho, PLLC  
Harvard Law School, Food Law and Policy Clinic  
Hawaii Cattlemen's Council  
Healthy Harvest of North Iowa  
Holistic Management International  
Hudson Valley AgriBusiness Development Corp.  
Illinois Environmental Council  
Illinois Stewardship Alliance  
Initiative for Rural Innovation & Stewardship  
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy  
Intervale Center  
Izaak Walton League, Illinois Division  
The John Merck Fund  
Jubilee Justice  
Kane County Development & Community Services Department  
Kane County Farmland Protection Program  
Kentucky Center for Agriculture and Rural Development  
Kitchen Table Consultants  
The Kohala Center

The Land Connection  
Land For Good  
Maine Farmland Trust  
Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association  
Mālama Kauaʻi  
Massachusetts Food System Collaborative  
Michigan Young Farmer Coalition  
Middlesex County Farm Bureau, Inc  
Midwest Organic & Sustainable Education Service  
Mill City Farmers Market  
Minnesota Farmers Union  
Minnesota Farmers' Market Association  
Morse Marketing Connections, LLC  
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition  
National Young Farmers Coalition  
NE/Millerton Climate Smart Task Force  
The New Connecticut Farmer Alliance  
New Entry Sustainable Farming Project  
NH Community Loan Fund  
NOFA/Mass  
Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York (NOFA-NY)  
Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont  
Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group  
Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance  
NW Indiana Food Council  
Oahu Resource Conservation and Development Council  
Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association  
Oregon Climate and Agriculture Network  
Oregon State University Center for Small Farms & Community Food Systems  
Oregon Tilth  
Organic Growers School  
Ottawa County  
Pasa Sustainable Agriculture  
PCO  
Piedmont Environmental Council

Potlikker Capital  
Ralph K Morris Foundation  
Renewing the Countryside  
RIDEM/Division of Agriculture/Forestry  
Rogue Farm Corps  
Small Business Development Center, Clackamas Community College  
South Hero Land Trust  
Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation  
Sprout MN  
Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota  
Sustainable Iowa Land Trust  
Thurston Economic Development Council  
UNH Cooperative Extension  
UNH Sustainability Institute (backbone organization of Food Solutions New England)  
The Valleys Planning Council, Inc.  
Vanguard Family Farm  
Vermont Housing and Conservation Board  
Vermont Land Trust  
Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund  
Vital Communities  
West Michigan Food Processing Association  
World Farmers