

December 8, 2020

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

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House of Representatives
U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC

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

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leaders Schumer and McCarthy:

As representatives of organizations that support specialty crop agriculture, grocers, hungry and undernourished Americans, and public health, we seek your support for \$51 million in emergency funding for the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP) in response to the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 on farmers, local grocers, poverty-induced hunger, and local economies across the country.

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

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.

The economic impacts of COVID-19 continue to leave more Americans hungry, especially families with children. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's Oct. 28 through Nov. 9 Household Pulse Survey, nearly 12 percent of all adults in the country, approximately 26 million Americans, reported that their household sometimes or often did not have enough to eat over the previous seven days. Additionally, Household Pulse Survey data for Oct. 14 through Oct. 26 indicated that between 7 and 11 million children live in a household where they did not get enough to eat because the household could not afford it. GusNIP programs have responded nationally and

report surging redemptions as these food insecure households seek to put adequate food on the table.

COVID-19 has also severely impacted fruit and vegetable producers across the country. Many operations large and small face significant financial stress as the pandemic continues to disrupt normal channels of business, especially sales to institutional and food service buyers.

GusNIP stretches families' food budgets, incentivizes healthier options and stimulates the local economy. Without an emergency increase, GusNIP grantees will be faced with exhausted funding at a time they are most needed in helping with the recovery phase of the pandemic. We urge Congress to expand USDA's match to GusNIP programs that are delivering critical, effective, and proven solutions to this crisis by providing \$51 million in emergency funding.

Sincerely,

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
American Heart Association
Center For Science In The Public Interest
Dariush Mozaffarian, MD DrPH, Tufts Friedman School of Nutrition Science & Policy
Environmental Working Group
Farm Credit Council
Farmers Market Coalition
Hunger Free America
National Association of State Departments of Agriculture
National Grocers Association
National Potato Council
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
National Young Farmers Coalition
Produce Marketing Association
Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems Funders
U.S. Apple Association
Union of Concerned Scientists

Cc: Senate Agriculture Committee; Chairman Pat Roberts
Senate Agriculture Committee; Ranking Member Debbie Stabenow
House Agriculture Committee; Chairman Colin Peterson
House Agriculture Committee; Ranking Member Mike Conaway