

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

May 7th, 2020

Re: Relief for America's Small Farmers Act

Dear Senators and Representatives:

The undersigned 55 farm, food, rural, community, consumer, faith and other advocacy organizations wholeheartedly endorse the Relief for America's Small Farmers Act, introduced by Sen. Gillibrand and Rep. Maloney, and urge you to be an original cosponsor of this landmark bill and support its inclusion in any future COVID-19 legislation.

As the United States grapples with the COVID-19 crisis, farmers and ranchers are enduring major disruptions to their domestic and export markets, and thousands of farmers have seen local markets such as schools and restaurants close overnight. Agricultural processing and food distribution channels are increasingly disrupted as workers, most of whom receive very few protections, fall ill. Farmers' markets and local food hubs have had to reduce or adapt operations to protect the health of both producers and customers.¹

While all farmers are affected by the crisis, small family farmers already operating on thin margins are most at risk of losing their farms, homes and land from the financial freefall caused by this pandemic, further harming the rural economies and the communities they call home. Without decisive action from Congress, we will lose thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of farms and the main street businesses they support, and risk dramatic disruptions to the integrity of America's food supply.

These challenges come at a catastrophically difficult period for family farmers. For more than six years, farmers and ranchers of all kinds have received prices consistently below their cost of production, which have driven historically high levels of farm debt (more than \$415 billion in 2019²) and the loss of more than 38,000 farms since 2016.³ Over this same period, producers in various regions of the country endured increasingly intense and frequent natural disasters, such

¹Financial impacts to local food systems alone are projected to be at least \$1.02 billion from March to December 2020 due to the short and long-term impacts of COVID-19. <https://sustainableagriculture.net/blog/covid-economic-impact-local-food/>

² USDA ERS: <https://data.ers.usda.gov/reports.aspx?ID=17835>

³ USDA Farms and Land in Farms 2020 Summary; USDA Farms and Land in Farms 2018 Summary

as the historic flooding throughout the Midwest last year, and volatile trade disputes that further degraded prices. In many cases, federal responses to these challenges have left out droves of producers, many of whom now stand on the brink of collapse through circumstances entirely outside their control.

Prior to the pandemic, projected medium farm income for 2020 was negative \$1,840⁴ with most farms relying on off-farm sources of income to support household finances and to secure benefits like healthcare coverage. Now, farm households are experiencing the compounding impacts of lost income from both farm and off-farm sources during the COVID crisis. The urgency of this moment cannot be stressed enough. Small family farmers are the backbone of our food system and rural economies, and they need our support in this moment of unprecedented hardship, especially while they galvanize to feed their communities. We cannot afford to lose a single additional farm.

The Relief for America's Small Farmers Act would provide direct debt relief for small farmers around the country by providing a one-time loan forgiveness of up to \$250,000 across three types of USDA FSA loans: Direct Operating, Direct Farm Ownership, and Emergency Loans. Eligible farmers must have an average AGI of \$300,000 or less over the previous 5 years, regardless of what they grow. Forgiveness of federally held debt is an important tool for directly assisting these farmers, most of whom have not benefited from prior farmer relief programs.

We call on you to consider co-sponsoring this legislation as an essential first step in a series of much needed financial assistance tools for farmers, in order to quickly and effectively support our food system and those who put food on our tables every day.

Sincerely,

ActionAid USA
American Sustainable Business Council
Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment
Carolina Common Enterprise
Carolina Farm Stewardship Association
Community Alliance for Global Justice
Community Farm Alliance
Community Food and Justice Coalition
Dakota Resource Council
Dakota Rural Action
EcoHealth Network

⁴ USDA. "Highlights From the February 2020 Farm Income Forecast." Updated February 25, 2020.

Fair World Project
Family Farm Defenders
Farm Aid
Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance
Farmer Veteran Coalition
Farmworker Association of Florida
Federation of Southern Cooperatives
Food & Water Action
Food for Maine's Future
Friends of the Earth
Fund for Democratic Communities
Grassroots International
Illinois Stewardship Alliance
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement
Iowa Farmers Union
Land For Good
Land Stewardship Project
National Family Farm Coalition
National Farmers Organization
North Carolina Association of Black Lawyers Land Loss Prevention Project
Northeast Organic Farming Association Interstate Council
Northeast Organic Farming Association of Massachusetts
Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Hampshire
Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Jersey
Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York
Northeast Organic Farming Association of Rhode Island
Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont
Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group
Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance
Ohio Farmers Union
People's Action
Peoples Climate Movement-NY
Pesticide Action Network
Progressive Agriculture Organization
Resilience Project
Rocky Mountain Farmers Union
R-CALF USA
Rural Advancement Foundation International – USA (RAFI-USA)
Rural Coalition

Rural Vermont
Sitka Salmon Shares
Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education, Inc.
Western Organization of Resource Councils

For more information, please contact:
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