



June 9, 2020

**NORTHEAST ORGANIC  
FARMING ASSOCIATION  
OF NEW HAMPSHIRE**

84 Silk Farm Road  
Concord, NH 03301  
(603) 224-5022  
info@nofanh.org  
www.nofanh.org

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**COVID-19 Emergency Fund Agricultural Allocations**

Dear Governor Sununu, Agricultural Commissioner Jasper and the GOFERR Advisory Board,

As organizations dedicated to building healthy, just, and resilient local food systems here in New Hampshire, we feel compelled to advocate for our state's small and mid-sized farms. We believe it is both responsible and important for our elected officials to distribute the incoming federal tax dollars fairly to all of New Hampshire's vital farmers.

From our perspective, small and mid-sized farms are being unfairly overlooked in the distribution of COVID-19 Emergency Funds, as these are presently being allocated. By distributing a \$1.5 million dollar federal infusion only to farms who grossed \$50,000 in 2019, the present plan excludes almost 90% of the over 4,100 farms in the Granite State.

According to the 2017 agricultural census, only 426 of the state's 4,123 farms have receipts of \$50,000 or more. The remaining 3,697 farms still feed NH, still contribute to NH's economy, still are stewards of NH's rugged land.

Added together, the vast majority of NH's small and mid-sized farms represent a sizeable percentage of the 425,393 acres being farmed in the state, acreage that provide open space and the much beloved rural characteristics of our state. NH farms provide visitors and residents alike (including those using SNAP benefits) with nutrient-dense, delicious, and often organic, fresh food - even in remote areas. These farms often spark the growth of value-added businesses in both food, forestry, and agritourism. They provide people with opportunities for creative, socially beneficial work. NH farms help keep this state's landscape diverse and beautiful, and the aquifers clean.

If the pandemic is showing us anything, it is that local food has become more desirable than ever before. Fostering a resilient agricultural sector means that we cannot lose the small and mid-size farms our neighbors and communities depend on. Small and mid-size farms are very efficient at providing for local needs in other ways as well – they do not need vast distribution networks, packaging, transport, and middle people.

*The Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Hampshire (NOFA-NH) is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization dedicated to building a community of organic food activists and educated consumers to help support New Hampshire's local organic farming community.*

The GOFERR Stakeholder Advisory Board requested testimony from NOFA-NH and other local farm or food organizations, and to inform our comments we conducted a survey, to which 60 NH farmers and 118 consumers responded. Two-thirds of the farmers reported negative financial impact from the public health crisis, including decreased demand from restaurants, farmers markets, on-farm retail, retail/food hubs, and wholesale institutions. At the same time, 70% of farmer respondents reported increased demand for their goods as well as increased cost of doing business. These data were among the information we shared with the GOFERR advisory board, yet in the hearing on May 14<sup>th</sup>, there was no mention of those responses. It does not appear the voices of NH's small and mid-sized farms were heard.

The COVID-19 funds are arriving at a time when Granite Staters have become painfully aware of the inefficiencies, volatilities, and brittleness of the national and global trade system; when empty grocery shelves have taught us all that a robust local food supply is going to become ever more essential in the future. CARES Act funding could mitigate losses to our state's farms, and they could even start us down the path to meet increasing demand for local food, strengthen farmer profitability, and increase NH's food security and food system resiliency.

The federal tax dollars from the CARES Act were sent in part to help restore the entire hard-hit NH agricultural sector. We see no reason not to allow any NH farm business to apply for relief funds. If a farmer can show economic losses due to COVID-19, each farmer should be valued and deemed an important part of NH's beloved rural culture. We urge reconsideration of the eligibility criteria and instead the creation of a relief package that benefits all NH farmers, large and small.

Sincerely,

Alice Groh, Four Corners Cooperative at the Temple-Wilton Community Farm  
Bob Butcher, North Sandwich, NH  
Gorhan Public Health Consulting  
Greater Nashua Food Council  
Grow Nashua  
Hungry Bear Farm  
Lost Nation Orchard  
Main Street Cheese, LLC  
Mountain Heartbeet Farm  
New Field Farm  
New Hampshire Farm to School  
New Hampshire Food Alliance  
NOFA-NH (Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Hampshire)  
Peterborough Agricultural Committee  
Picadilly Farm  
Seacoast Eat Local  
Seacoast NH Permaculture  
Stonewall Farm  
Town of Durham NH Agricultural Commission

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