

COVID-19 Community Food Distribution Community Innovations

In the face of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the country is seeing innovations in communities that highlight the best of human ingenuity. We highlight these stories to show how many are helping those around them, and prompt everyone to think about how they can help others.¹

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the country faces a disruption in the traditional food supply chain causing challenges to farmers, restaurants, food banks, and food assistance programs. Communities nationwide are developing innovative food distribution best practices to continue serving those at risk of hunger while leveraging the skills, labor, or supply chains of struggling businesses.

United States Department of Agriculture Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Benefits

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) has both created and adjusted many programs in response to COVID-19. Information on these efforts, eligibility, rates and implementation can be found by visiting the [USDA Coronavirus Website](#). Many states and Indian Tribal Organizations (ITOs) have been approved for the USDA Disaster Household Distribution (DHD) programs. For further information on your state or organization please visit the [USDA DHD Website](#).

The USDA [has also](#) launched an online pilot program to expand their [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\)](#) allowing individuals to utilize SNAP while shopping online. The expanded program provides shoppers with the opportunity to purchase nutritional foods online with their electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card. SNAP benefits cannot be used for delivery services. Numerous states have been approved for the SNAP Online Purchasing Pilot. For further information please refer to the [Food and Nutrition Service \(FNS\) Online Purchasing Pilot website](#).²

¹ This document contains references and links to non-federal resources and organizations. This information is meant solely for informational purposes and is not intended to be an endorsement of any non-federal entity by FEMA, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, or the U.S. government.

² <https://www.fns.usda.gov/>



FEMA

Disaster Household Distribution Program

The Maryland Department of Human Services, in conjunction with the Maryland Food Bank and Capital Area Food Bank, is launching the Disaster Household Distribution Program for areas most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The program provides food packages for one and two person households including frozen items and pantry staples. Larger households are able to apply to receive multiple packages. The packages are filled with existing supplies of USDA-purchased foods.³

Restaurants

Selling Groceries

Many restaurants nationwide are turning their stores into makeshift markets, utilizing their neighborhood networks to open up their pantries and supplies to customers. Items available include produce, meats, bakery items, prepared foods and household staples. Major foodservice distributors began helping restaurants create these new mini markets. A new website by Sysco named [Sysco Pop Up Shop](#) offers resources on how restaurants can get started and grow their business to offer additional essential products. For additional tips on selling groceries from restaurants please visit the [National Restaurant Association website](#).^{4 5 6 7 8 9}

Selling Family Meals

Local, chain, and fast food restaurants across the country are offering family style meals. The meals generally include enough food for two to four individuals. The food options are either ready-to-eat options or ingredients to prepare at home.^{10 11 12}

³ <https://patch.com/maryland/rockville/s/h3ds5/food-distribution-program-aid-areas-md-high-concentrations-newly-unemployed>

⁴ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/michelinemaynard/2020/04/29/from-fine-dining-to-fast-food-family-meals-are-restaurants-latest-shutdown-focus/#53d0395e1691>

⁵ <https://www.nbcboston.com/news/coronavirus/boston-restaurants-begin-selling-groceries-amid-coronavirus-pandemic/2113858/>

⁶ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/phillempert/2020/04/19/the-restaurnart-will-be-the-new-post-covid-19-restaurant-model/#28d5fabe7a4e>

⁷ <https://dc.eater.com/maps/mapping-d-c-restaurants-that-sell-groceries-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak>

⁸ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/04/11/restaurant-grocery-sell-coronavirus/>

⁹ <https://wtop.com/business-finance/2020/04/farmers-restaurant-group-morphs-into-full-fledged-e-commerce-market-and-grocer/>

¹⁰ <https://www.nrn.com/fast-casual/noodles-company-sees-sales-improve-after-adding-curbside-pickup-75-restaurants>

¹¹ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/aliciakelso/2020/04/30/chick-fil-a-is-bringing-back-its-meal-kits-for-pantry-fatigued-families/#5e7e7ec851ac>

¹² <https://www.forbes.com/sites/michelinemaynard/2020/04/29/from-fine-dining-to-fast-food-family-meals-are-restaurants-latest-shutdown-focus/#53d0395e1691>

Providing Workers Food

Many restaurants have had to lay off workers due to the economic hardships of COVID-19. A restaurant in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania has been providing their former employees food. The restaurant is providing former workers family-size portions to help them avoid the financial burden of buying groceries and meals.¹³

Food Trucks at Rest Stops

Truckers have begun facing difficulty finding food for themselves on long journeys as many restaurants at highway rest stops are either closed or operating with limited hours and drive-thru restaurants are not accessible to semi-trucks. The California's State Transportation Department allows food trucks to obtain a free permit to park at highway rest stops and sell food to truckers and others in need.¹⁴

Resources for Restaurants and Bars

Streetsense, a company specializing in retail, restaurant, hospitality and real estate solutions has launched a toolkit to aid restaurant industry contacts in understanding, planning and mitigating the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic to their establishments. The toolkit contains resources for managing capital, planning for relaunch and provides recommendations on operation adjustments and increasing guest engagement. Individuals are able to sign up and download the report on the [Streetsense Website](https://streetsense.com/blog/pandemic-relaunch-toolkit-for-restaurants-bars/). For additional tips on reopening restaurants please visit the [National Restaurant Association website](https://www.restaurant.org/covid-19).¹⁵

Farmers and Agriculture Production

Community-Supported Agriculture Programs

Community-supported agriculture (CSA) is a system through which individuals pay to regularly receive fresh produce from nearby farms, sometimes with an option to also receive local meat and dairy.¹⁶ CSAs provide groceries direct-to-consumer, allowing individuals to receive groceries at home instead of going to public supermarkets and risking their health. Many CSAs allow for direct donations to local farmers who are facing financial difficulties during the pandemic.¹⁷ In addition, decentralized and localized systems such as CSA's are more resilient in the face of disruption and may help bolster our community's food supply chain against future crises.

Farmers to Consumers

An increase in demand for fresh produce can has been demonstrated by a number of individuals purchasing directly

¹³ <https://6abc.com/montgomery-county-montco-founding-farmers-famers-pa/6053317/>

¹⁴ <https://reason.com/2020/04/25/covid-19-highlights-the-harms-of-bad-food-regulations-and-the-benefits-of-lifting-them/>

¹⁵ <https://streetsense.com/blog/pandemic-relaunch-toolkit-for-restaurants-bars/>

¹⁶ <https://detroit.eater.com/2020/4/24/21232670/southeast-michigan-detroit-farms-csas-stands-online-ordering-groceries-plant-starts-covid-19>

¹⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/apr/23/us-farms-csa-food-coronavirus>

to farms and online. Farmers have shifted from selling wholesale to direct to consumers.¹⁸ Local farms in Chicago have added the options of home delivery and contactless pick up points throughout the city.¹⁹

Farmers to Families Food Box

As part of the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP), USDA is now providing [\\$19 billion in relief support](#) for the Farmers to Families Food Box Program. This program is intended to support farmers and ranchers, while maintaining the integrity of the food supply chain and ensure every American continues to receive and have access to the food they need. The USDA also recently published [Frequently Asked Questions](#) for nonprofit organizations engaged in food distribution and seeking to receive food through the Farmers to Families Food Box Program.²⁰

Farms to Food Banks

Farmers have partnered with organizations in New York to grow fresh produce and vegetables. The GoFundMe for the group, called Farms to Food Banks, is raising money to buy truckloads of food from farmers to then be donated to food banks in need in the New York area. This effort aims to both ease the financial burden farmers are facing and aid the undersupplied food banks.^{21 22}

Pay for A Box and Donate a Box

In Tampa Bay, a website has been set up where customers can pay for a box of fresh vegetables for themselves and donate to the food bank at the same time. The content of the boxes changes weekly depending what foods are available. Boxes are available for delivery three days a week at local food banks, more information is available at <http://buyfarmfood.com>.²³

Nonprofit Organizations

World Central Kitchen

World Central Kitchen, a mid-Atlantic based nonprofit organization, has served more than three million fresh meals and is providing nearly 200,000 meals daily during the pandemic. In addition, World Central Kitchen founder and restaurateur Chef Jose Andrés has transformed five restaurant locations into community kitchens, where he offers discounted meals for takeout daily and launched a bodega market at three restaurant locations to sell staple pantry

¹⁸ <https://www.sunjournal.com/2020/04/22/covid-19-forces-farmers-to-take-new-approaches-to-satisfy-growing-demand/#>

¹⁹ <https://www.timeout.com/chicago/news/these-11-nearby-farms-are-delivering-fresh-produce-straight-to-chicagoans-doors-042420>

²⁰ <https://www.ams.usda.gov/selling-food-to-usda/farmers-to-families-food-box>

²¹ <https://www.ny1.com/nyc/all-boroughs/news/2020/04/25/42-000-pounds-of-potatoes-donated-to-hungry-south-bronx-families>

²² <https://www.kmvt.com/content/news/Cassia-farm-sends-potatoes-cross-country-to-New-York-charity-569953891.html>

²³ <https://www.tampabay.com/news/health/2020/04/24/this-pinellas-man-is-helping-distribute-wimauma-farms-produce-boxes/>

items and household goods. The World Central Kitchen has utilized sporting venues to prepare and distribute thousands of free meals to those in need.²⁴

Feeding Tampa Bay

Feeding Tampa Bay is donating pallets of fresh produce to the Tampa Metropolitan Area Young Man's Christian Association (YMCA) Veggie Van every Wednesday. The Veggie Van delivers fresh fruits, vegetables, and sweet treats to individuals living in food deserts. A food desert is an area located at least one mile from the nearest supermarket, supercenter or grocery store in urban areas and more than ten miles in rural areas. The van creates a nutritional and free mobile marketplace. The items are prepackaged and grab-and-go at no cost while still utilizing social distancing measures.²⁵

Team Rubicon and Feeding America Partnership

Due to increased demand on food supplies and a shortage of manpower, Team Rubicon has partnered with Feeding America to ensure that families in vulnerable communities get the food and supplies they need throughout the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. Team Rubicon volunteers, comprised mainly of veterans, provide the manpower, experience, and know-how to support food bank operations. They package food for distribution, deliver meals to the homebound, coordinate logistics, organize fellow volunteers, and conduct warehouse management.²⁶

Salvation Army and Meals on Wheels Collaboration

Together with Salvation Army in Baltimore, Maryland, Meals on Wheels of Central Maryland has provided 20,000 meals to communities struggling with hunger. In collaboration with other National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) members, the Salvation Army is also coordinating service delivery and filling gaps. The Salvation Army has 7,600 centers of operations which allows them to use facilities such as camps, warehouses, shelters and thrift stores to support the whole-community response in providing food, supplies, and manage donations.²⁷

Food Retailers

Publix Super Markets

A Publix Supermarket in Orlando, Florida is purchasing fresh produce and milk from local farmers and dairies to donate to Feeding America member food banks. The effort is aimed toward bridging the gap between the needs of families and farmers impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Publix plans for the effort to last several weeks.²⁸

²⁴ <https://www.wusa9.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/jose-andres-free-meals-baltimore-stadium-world-central-kitchen/65-3a67e702-981c-4118-8e4d-ba0e4d0abd68>

²⁵ <https://patch.com/florida/newportrichey/s/h3d0w/veggie-van-brings-free-fresh-produce-tampa-bay-food-deserts>

²⁶ <https://teamrubiconusa.org/blog/feeding-america-partnership/>

²⁷ <https://www.salvationarmyusa.org/usn/covid19/>

²⁸ <https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/04/23/843300677/supermarket-steps-up-to-buy-from-farmers-dairies-and-donate-to-food-banks>

FEMA's Best Practice Initiative

There are extraordinary efforts nationwide to support personnel and resource needs to battle the COVID-19 pandemic. FEMA is working to highlight these efforts and encourage everyone to think about what they can do to be a part of providing solutions to help. Visit <https://www.fema.gov/coronavirus/best-practices> for more information.

Topics for the “Best Practices” series are generated from crowd-sourced suggestions. Have an idea? Let us research it! Organizations and individuals can e-mail best practices or lessons learned to fema-cipsupport@fema.dhs.gov.

For more information on how to help during COVID-19, visit [FEMA's website for information on donations and volunteering](#).

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