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Gov. Wolf Announces \$10 Million Available to Support Pennsylvania's Food System

\$10 Million in CARES Act Funding Available for Eligible Businesses in Low-to-Moderate Income Areas

Harrisburg, PA – Governor Tom Wolf today announced that \$10 million is now available for Pennsylvania businesses that have worked to maintain access to fresh, healthy food throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Pennsylvania’s food retailers stepped up to the plate to protect those putting food on the shelf, to think outside of the box to protect the most vulnerable, and to make investments to support those using assistance programs such as SNAP and WIC to support their families,” said Gov. Wolf. “I will be forever grateful to those who have worked hard to ensure food is always accessible through this pandemic; our frontline workers in grocery stores and farmers markets are among Pennsylvania’s heroes.”

[The Fresh Food Financing Initiative COVID-19 Relief Fund](#) — funded through the CARES Act — is available to for-profit, nonprofit, or cooperative entities impacted by COVID-19, including grocery stores, corner stores, convenience stores, neighborhood markets, bodegas, food hubs, mobile markets, farmers markets, on-farm markets, urban farms, and food aggregation centers with a direct connection to direct-to-consumer retail outlets.

To be eligible, more than 50 percent of sales must be from staple and perishable foods to consumers and the retailer must serve customers that live in a low-to-moderate income area. Applicants must also provide access to affordable, high-quality fresh produce, meat and dairy products and other healthy grocery items for low-to-moderate income shoppers, and must accept SNAP and WIC to the maximum extent possible.

In recognition of the disproportionate impacts of both COVID-19 and food apartheid on communities made up of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), and especially Black and African American communities, prioritization will be given to businesses owned by minorities and serving low-income BIPOC communities. Additional prioritization criteria include

businesses located in or serving a USDA-designated food desert; businesses sourcing and selling Pennsylvania grown or processed products to the extent practicable; and applicants with supplier diversity and offering increased business opportunities for Minority Business Enterprises, Women Business Enterprises, Service-Disabled Veteran Business Enterprises, Veteran Business Enterprises, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Business Enterprises; and Disability-Owned Business Enterprises.

“This pandemic has revealed many things, one of the most prevalent has been about where our food comes from – how it gets from the farm to those who need it. This relief fund is about strengthening the local food system and improving food security and nutrition,” said Sec. Redding. “We need to stimulate local economies, increase market opportunities for Pennsylvania farmers, create jobs, and contribute to better health by improving access to fresh, local foods – we need to feed Pennsylvania, now and in the years to come. And that is all a part of this initiative.”

The program is administered by the Department of Agriculture in partnership with the Department of Community and Economic Development. Applications will be accepted through August 14, 2020. Grant funds will be distributed to eligible applicants for impacts related to COVID-19 that have been incurred between March 1, 2020 and November 30, 2020, such as:

- Higher operating costs related to cleaning and social distancing requirements, including costs related to outside contracting associated with managing social distancing, limited occupancy, and cleaning;
- Infrastructure improvements including renovation, new construction, or adaptive reuse directly related to COVID-19;
- Equipment purchases that improve the availability of quality fresh food, such as additional refrigeration to manage volume, or personal protective equipment such as plexiglass dividers;
- Inventory (higher cost of goods, higher transportation or delivery costs, or procuring Pennsylvania-grown produce, meat, and dairy products, or loss of product);
- Innovative food access technology such as mobile or pop-up markets, or mobile EBT reader technology;
- Costs to expand access to Pennsylvania grown or processed produce, dairy and meat products or provide stable market access for Pennsylvania farmers that have lost or limited markets; and
- Other one-time or increased expenses incurred related to COVID-19.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the individuals and businesses that stepped up to protect and provide for their communities over the past several months, by supplying critical goods and services,” said Sec. Davin. “Little is as life sustaining as providing access to fresh, healthy food, especially in food-insecure areas. This funding will help alleviate the financial burdens placed on Pennsylvania’s food system during the pandemic and will ensure continued access to nutritional foods as we work toward greater recovery.”

"A very big part of staying healthy is having access to healthy food. The effects of this pandemic are challenging communities across this commonwealth where access to fresh food is limited, particularly urban communities," said state Representative Austin Davis (D-Allegheny). "This innovative program will help food retailers to maintain access to healthy, fresh food for people who depend on it."

"During these unprecedented times, it is critical that we provide support to the communities and organizations that need them most. The COVID-19 pandemic has illuminated the vulnerability of so many people who are struggling with food insecurity, especially how food deserts disproportionately impact communities of color," said state Senator Tim Kearney (D-Chester, Delaware). "The Fresh Food Financing Initiative is an important step in putting food on the tables of individuals and families in need. Now more than ever, this initiative is essential to fighting hunger and ensuring access to healthy food for those hit hardest by this crisis."

"Like so many things, food insecurity across the commonwealth -- and especially in our urban areas -- has been exacerbated by the current pandemic," said state Representative Stephen Kinsey (D-Philadelphia). "Ensuring communities of color have access to fresh, perishable, and affordable foods to feed their families has never been more important and this program invests in the grocers and food providers who have struggled to ensure access through this crisis."

"Like many businesses across our commonwealth, supermarkets that have utilized the Fresh Food Financing Initiative to locate in food deserts are incurring additional expenses due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These grocers need assistance to safely remain open and to continue providing fresh and healthy food to these underserved communities, which far too often are communities of color," said state Senator Pam Iovino (D-Allegheny, Washington). "As Pennsylvania pursues a holistic response to the pandemic, this funding will serve to support local economies and community health, particularly for some of those hardest hit."

For full details on [Fresh Food Financing Initiative COVID-19 Relief Fund](#) eligibility, award amounts, additional prioritizations, and criteria visit agriculture.pa.gov/foodsecurity.

For information as it relates to agriculture during COVID-19 mitigation in Pennsylvania visit agriculture.pa.gov/COVID. For the most accurate, timely information related to Health in Pennsylvania, visit on.pa.gov/coronavirus.

MEDIA CONTACTS: Lyndsay Kensinger, Gov's Office, RA-GVGOVPRESS@pa.gov
Shannon Powers, Ag, shpowers@pa.gov
Casey Smith, DCED, casesmith@pa.gov

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