



April 21, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
 Speaker of the House  
 United States House of Representatives  
 H-232, U.S. Capitol Washington, D.C.  
 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
 Majority Leader  
 United States Senate  
 S-230, U.S. Capitol Washington, D.C.  
 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
 Minority Leader  
 United States House of Representatives  
 H-204, U.S. Capitol Washington, D.C.  
 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
 Minority Leader  
 United States Senate  
 S-220, U.S. Capitol Washington, D.C.  
 20510

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

As organizations that work directly with rural communities and low-income communities of color in California, **we write to request that the next economic stimulus package immediately respond to the dire needs of farm and food workers, as well as rural communities at large.** COVID-19 is hitting low-wage workers, undocumented individuals and families, and communities of color in disproportionate and staggering ways, with repercussions that will last far into the future if emergency action is not taken to mitigate these impacts.

***Supporting Agricultural Workers and Families and Strengthening Workforce Protections***  
 California is the nation’s agricultural powerhouse in terms of production and economic value. However, farm and food workers who drive this sector remain disenfranchised and face massive economic, health, environmental and housing challenges that put them at disproportionate risk of negative health impacts. Despite being deemed “essential workers” during the COVID-19 pandemic, farm and food workers remain without proper safety equipment and protection, lack health insurance and access to healthcare, and are dangerously left out of the benefits and

relief of the Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act and the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA).

To protect farm and food workers, we urge Congress to:

- Allocate resources to provide adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) and access to soap and water and hand sanitizer to frontline workers including farmworkers, food processing workers, bus drivers, truck drivers, warehouse workers, grocery store workers, food bank volunteers and other essential volunteers and paid workers during this pandemic. Require employers to provide these critical safety materials.
- Mandate physical distancing measures and provision of safety equipment to keep farm, food, and warehouse workers safe.
- Expand paid sick and family leave access to people who work for employers with fewer than 50 employees and require employers with more than 500 employees to provide these same benefits. Farmworkers, food processing workers, domestic workers and other frontlines workers must share in this benefit.
- Mandate and support hazard pay for essential and frontline workers during the pandemic. Take all actions necessary to prevent the adoption of wage reductions of essential farmworkers proposed by the Trump administration.
- Provide immediate, direct cash assistance for workers and families who are excluded from the federal CARES Act aid due to the social security number and tax filing requirements of the federal rebate checks and ensure that those who are undocumented and those who did not make enough income to file 2018/19 tax returns are eligible to receive funds.
- Increase unemployment insurance (UI) benefits to workers who do not qualify for the federal UI augmentation.
- Invest in the preservation, improvement, and development of affordable housing for farmworkers and farmworker communities in order to facilitate observance of shelter-in-place guidance and directives and support social distancing by alleviating over-crowding.
- Ensure that safety and social distancing measures are implemented in farmworker transportation, such as agricultural vanpools and buses.

### ***Ensuring Equitable Disbursement of Agricultural Funds to Support Small-scale Family Farmers and Socially-disadvantaged Farmers***

As Congress considers new funding for agriculture, and works with USDA to disburse the \$9.5 billion dollars provided by the CARES Act, it is imperative that these funds support small-scale family farmers and farmers of color that are on the brink of unrecoverable losses and need these funds the most. Rather than allow this funding to be solely prop up industrial, corporate agriculture, disbursement should prioritize grants to these farmers, who help fuel local economies and food systems across the country, often creatively finding ways to keep people fed despite supply chain challenges.

### ***Investing in Rural Areas, Local Communities & Equitable, Clean, Quality Jobs***

Funding allocated in the CARES Act for rural broadband, telemedicine, distance learning, rural hospitals and healthcare access and communications capacity are greatly needed and should be expanded. In particular, we ask that Congress:

- Ensure rapid deployment of mobile hotspots, especially to rural areas without broadband infrastructure to stay connected with their families, public health notifications, education.
- Allocate funding to train health professionals who will serve underserved areas, address those regions' healthcare gaps, and maintain cultural and linguistic abilities and backgrounds to serve communities of color, immigrants, and low-income rural areas.
- Create sufficient emergency housing opportunities for people living in farmworker housing that does not allow sufficient space for social distancing, and for populations living in unstable conditions including, for example, tenants of mobile home parks and tenants on Tribal land that don't have the same protections as other tenants.
- Include requirements in workforce development investments related to COVID-19 response that facilitate high quality jobs in underserved areas including, but not limited to, local hire requirements, living wage and benefit provisions, prioritization of women and minority owned farms and businesses, and provision of worker training and certification programs with pipelines to high quality career opportunities, including careers in a growing clean energy sector.

We thank you for considering the immediate needs of *all* essential workers, rural communities, local economies, and communities of color. Please feel free to contact [jjordan@leadershipcounsel.org](mailto:jjordan@leadershipcounsel.org) with any questions.

Sincerely,

Julia Jordan, Policy Coordinator  
Leadership Counsel for Justice &  
Accountability

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