

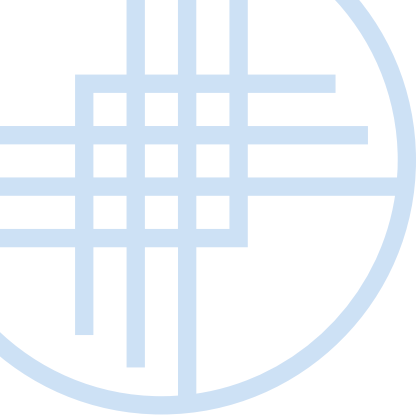


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# Hungry for Action: Building Food System Resiliency amid COVID-19

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and Care Shoaibi





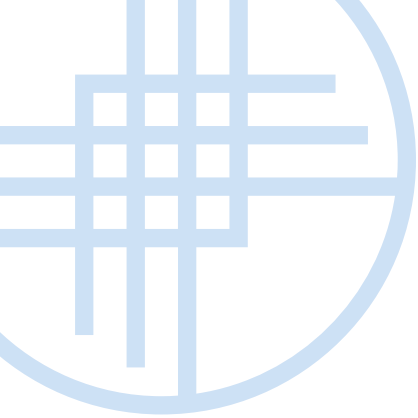
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These activities are designed to help people build meaningful lives in which they can experience health and well-being, pursue effective education and gainful employment, and access the resources required to create ever-expanding opportunities for themselves and their broader communities.

## ABOUT THE CENTER FOR PUBLIC HEALTH

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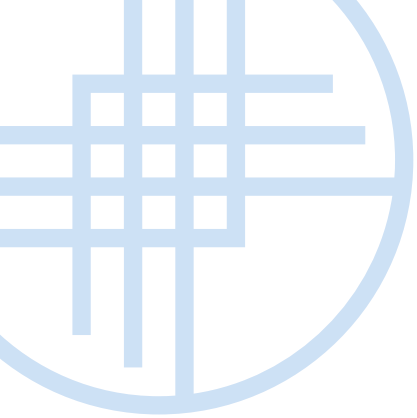


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# Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to highlight the importance of a resilient food system. As images of emptying grocery shelves filled the news this spring and the reality of many experiencing sudden food insecurity set in, a multilevel, collaborative response worked to ensure people could access nourishing food. Many of the health and economic disparities illuminated by the pandemic are systemic public health issues that were already critical pre-pandemic. In 2019, 13.6 percent of households with children experienced food insecurity,<sup>1</sup> yet with the historic employment upheaval brought on by COVID-19, rates of people experiencing food insecurity have grown.<sup>2</sup>



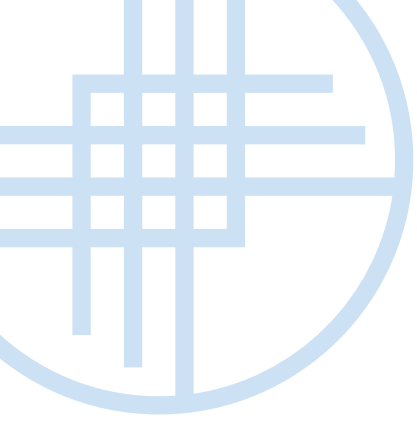
**IN MAY 2020,  
MORE THAN ONE IN  
FIVE PARENTS LIVING  
WITH CHILDREN UNDER  
AGE 19 REPORTED THAT  
THEIR HOUSEHOLDS  
EXPERIENCED FOOD  
INSECURITY DURING  
THE PAST MONTH.<sup>3</sup>**



During the initial stages of the COVID-19 response, nonprofits, private industry, and policymakers were met with the challenge of protecting the health of the population and businesses by reinforcing a resilient supply chain, supporting the restaurant industry's changing landscape, and addressing food access during isolation, among other challenges. However, these stakeholders struggled to grasp the breadth of responses being made, impacting their own ability to identify opportunities and fill gaps with meaningful actions. The Milken Institute Center for Public Health's COVID-19 Food Response and Policy Inventory (the Inventory) provided a consolidated view into how actors across the food system responded to the initial challenges to nourish our communities while participating in new social distancing guidelines.<sup>4</sup> The following summary data analysis sets the stage for further intentional data collection and impact analysis.

**Our analysis of trends in the Inventory and follow-up interviews with nearly a dozen food systems stakeholders make one key finding clear: Innovative partnerships are critical to a resilient food system. This report identifies successful, scalable partnership trends and ways for food system stakeholders to create and nurture impactful partnerships.**

Existing public-private partnerships were integral to our emergency food system pre-pandemic, and the expansion of this infrastructure was crucial in the initial pandemic response.<sup>5</sup> These established partnerships include The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), which supplied 20 percent of the food distributed through local hunger-relief agencies last year;<sup>6</sup> the Supplemental



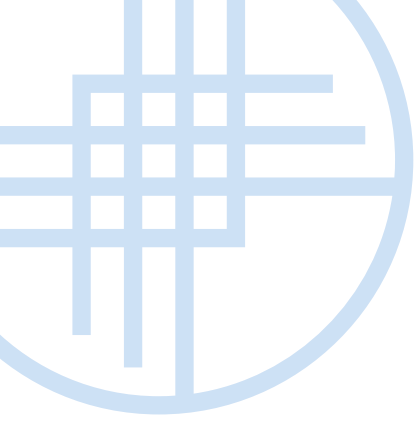
Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps); the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (often called "Senior Boxes"), which supplements food for low-income individuals who are aged 60 and older.

Enhancing these and other strategic partnerships rooted in community need can create a more cohesive approach than stopgap solutions or one-time donations. Additionally, the private sector's strengths and resources can forge powerful partnerships in crisis response times and aid in long-term recovery.

The Inventory underscores the importance of how industries and essential workforces are interconnected across the entire food system. The actions taken by food system stakeholders reaffirm the importance of a resilient food system, both for recovery and to prepare effectively for future emergencies.



**RESILIENT FOOD SYSTEMS CAN PREVENT DISASTERS AND CRISES AS WELL AS ANTICIPATE, ABSORB, ACCOMMODATE, OR RECOVER FROM THEM IN A TIMELY, EFFICIENT, AND SUSTAINABLE MANNER.<sup>7</sup>**



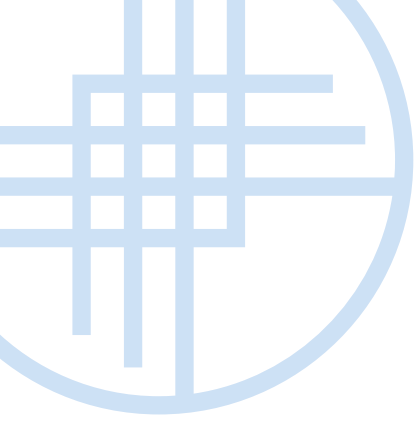
# COVID-19 Food Response and Policy Inventory

The Inventory tracked 223 retailers, restaurants, “other industry” (i.e., food manufacturers and distributors), and nonprofit organizations' responses and 69 policies, updated twice a week from March 20 to July 15, 2020. All Inventory information was derived from publicly available resources, including organizations' websites and social media, food systems media blasts, trade association press releases, and government websites. The Center for Public Health solicited responses through an open survey for food systems stakeholders, found on the Inventory landing page. To be included in the Inventory, an organization must have been performing at least one of the following actions in response to COVID-19 during the March to July time period: providing food or monetary donations, engaging in partnerships or solutions to improve food access, enhancing benefits for employees, or supporting essential workforce members. Further, the retailers, restaurants, and nonprofits included in the Inventory operate in at least three states or serve one of the 10 most populous metro areas in the US.

Retailers were limited to a grocery delivery service or a grocery or convenience store with a minimum of 50 locations. Restaurants were limited to an eatery or coffee shop with a minimum of 25 locations. Food delivery organizations were included in the restaurant category, given their significant role in providing restaurant meals under social distancing guidelines. “Other industry” represented for-profit food stakeholders with \$1 million in revenue or more than 500 employees that were not restaurants or retailers, including food and beverage manufacturers, distributors, agricultural producers, trade associations, and technical or logistics services. Nonprofits had to be registered as a 501(c)(3) providing emergency food, funds, or resources to improve food access.

Regarding federal policies, the Inventory tracked major economic stimulus bills; US Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Food and Drug Administration regulatory actions regarding food safety and inspection; regulatory waivers listed on the USDA Food and Nutrition Service Response to COVID-19 webpage;<sup>8</sup> and other federal actions (e.g., declarations, reauthorizations, and major partnerships) directly impacting food access. In addition, the Inventory tracked state and local policies that affected food access, affordability, supply chain, and essential business operations in the 10 most populous metro areas.

Though the Inventory did not capture all individual responses within the breadth of food system stakeholders' actions, the sample represents both broader trends and unique innovations. Neither the Inventory nor the analysis in this report is an endorsement of one organization, company, or approach over another.

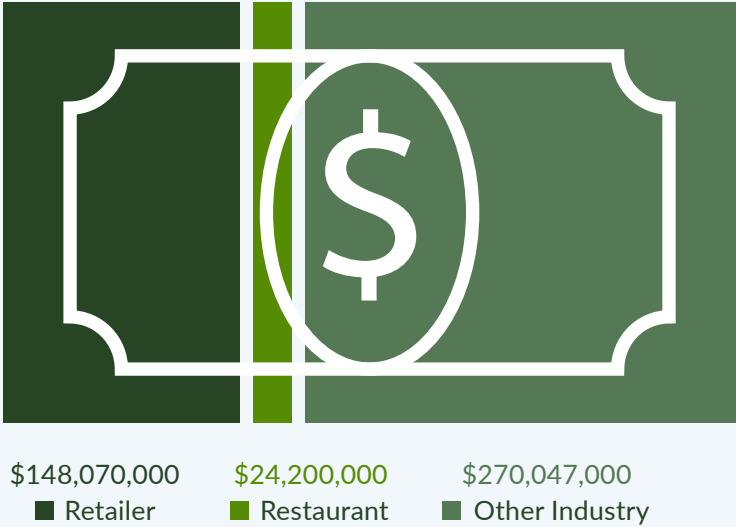


# Nonprofit and Private-Sector Responses

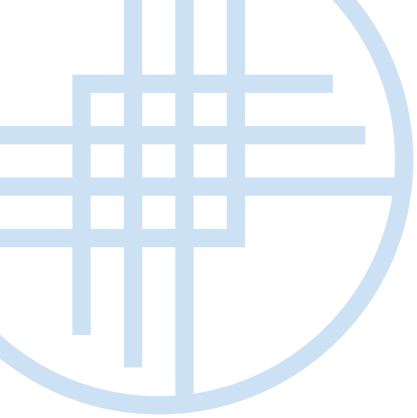
**Retailers, restaurants, and “other industry” (i.e., manufacturers and distributors) stakeholders most successfully relied on actively partnering with or donating resources to those within the existing nonprofit ecosystem.**

The 223 total organizations tracked consisted of 52 retailers, 49 restaurants, 66 “other industry” stakeholders, and 56 nonprofits. The private-sector organizations reported a total of \$442 million in monetary commitments and nearly 75 million pounds of food and meal donations (Figures 1 and 2). During the time period of tracking data for this inventory, one-quarter of private-sector worked with local partners where they are headquartered or operated. Other responses involved in-kind donations, varying from donating logistics infrastructure, such as delivery trucks for shipping donations, to free advertising space for public health authorities to broadcast safety messaging.<sup>9</sup>

**Figure 1: Monetary Commitment by Industry**



Source: Milken Institute (2020)



**Figure 2: Pounds of Food/Meals Donated by Industry**



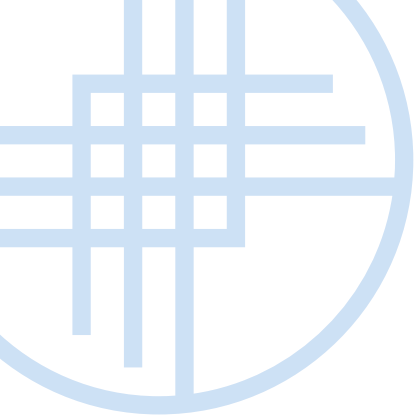
*Source: Milken Institute (2020)*

Retailers were much more likely to donate directly to local partners than the other parts of the food system. Direct local partner donations are expected because many retailers have longstanding partnerships with food rescue and local emergency food organizations. Because excess stock was minimal as shelves rapidly emptied, retailers pivoted toward monetary donations.

Over one-quarter of all private-sector organizations donated to large scale, nationwide anti-hunger organizations. Of the total responses included in the Inventory, 26 percent of private-sector responses were directed at Feeding America, No Kid Hungry, World Central Kitchen, or Meals on Wheels. Yet, Feeding America—who built robust relationships with food industry stakeholders before the pandemic—was the beneficiary twice as often as the other three combined.

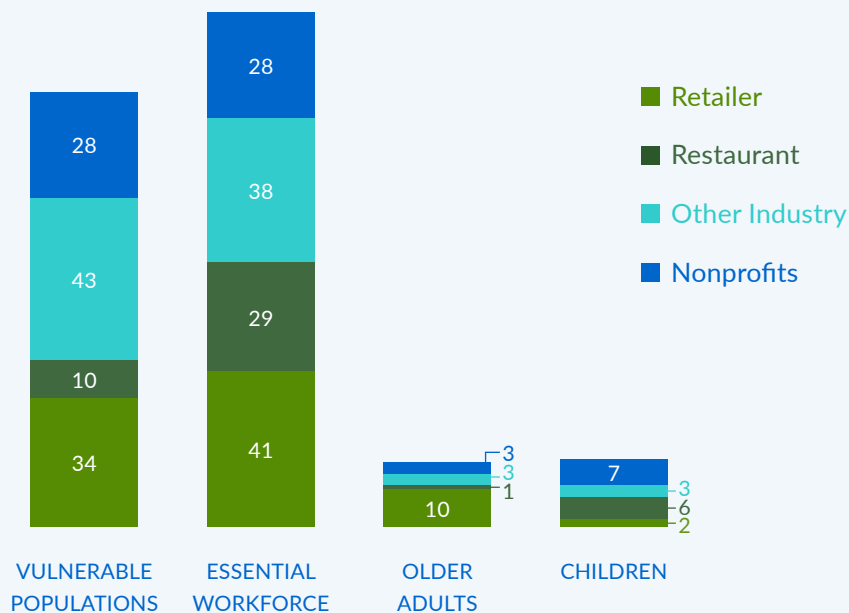
**Private organizations launched new partnerships that extended beyond passive donations.** In one innovative partnership, Kroger experienced a surge in grocery demand and, in turn, worked with Sysco and US Foods to offer jobs to their furloughed employees.<sup>10</sup> Other innovative partnerships focused on opportunities to re-staff workers to areas of greatest need, provide contract opportunities for chefs and restaurant staff, and establish creative distribution models. Overall, “other industry” stakeholders were twice as likely as retailers or restaurants to develop these new partnerships.





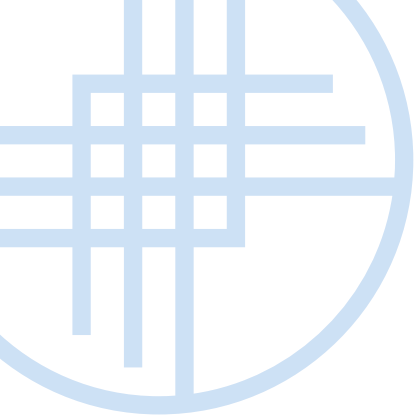
Given the disproportionate effects of COVID-19 on specific populations, many nonprofit and private-sector organizations directed their efforts to populations most in need of rapid assistance, including vulnerable populations, essential workforce members, older adults, and children. Vulnerable populations included individuals and families who are immunocompromised, are experiencing homelessness or food insecurity, or have low incomes. For this report, older adults and children are separated from vulnerable population status if they were the sole group recipient.

**Figure 3: Population-Specific Responses by Sector**



Source: Milken Institute (2020)

Across organization types, 52 percent of total responses were directed to vulnerable populations, 61 percent at essential workforce members, 8 percent at older adults, and 8 percent at children (Figure 3). The distribution by population and organization is provided in Figure 3.



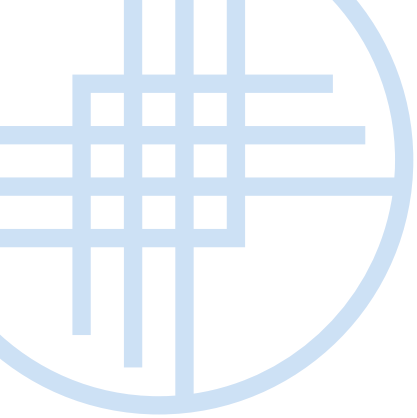
**Nonprofit organizations remained the foundation of agile, quick-acting responses to deliver food in innovative ways to people most in need.**

Local nonprofits were best positioned to fill food insecurity gaps and to help people in need creatively, but more data are needed. The decentralized nature of hunger-relief organizations makes it difficult to quantify how many people use these services, grasp their wide variety of models, or evaluate the health impact.

Of the Inventory's sample of nonprofits, 48 percent distributed food using innovative, community-based approaches, including rescuing food from institutional sources, repurposing restaurants as community kitchens, and setting up "micro-pantries" at easily accessible locations. Seven percent of nonprofits tracked in the Inventory, labeled "knowledge providers"—such as advocacy organizations or think tanks—offered services that ranged from providing resource referrals and nutrition counseling to developing aggregated lists of local restaurants or farms to support. Funders, who solely provided monetary assistance, made up 43 percent of nonprofits tracked. Many of these funders established grant programs targeted towards restaurants and small businesses and their workers throughout the food supply chain. There was an overwhelming demand for these monetary contributions, and funders reported they often had to close applications soon after the initial grant announcement. Given the rapidly increasing rates of food insecurity directly tied to sudden COVID-19-related furloughs and unemployment, monetary assistance was a crucial intervention for populations experiencing these effects.

**Businesses prioritized protecting their workforce, with 58 percent expanding employee benefits, including enhanced pay or leave.**

Nearly all retailers whose employees were considered essential frontline workers provided protective equipment including masks and plexiglass partitions, and 79 percent enhanced employee benefits. Of the 22 employee funds established to offset unexpected expenses, more than one-half were from retailers. Retailers were also most likely to both respond to their internal audiences, like expanding benefits for employees, and also external audiences, like donating to the community. This may reflect their increase in revenue given changing consumer buying habits. Restaurants, which faced extreme operating challenges due to stay-at-home orders, were more likely to focus their responses internally, with 69 percent expanding employee benefits. However, while 12 organizations made some form of permanent commitments, many of the expanded employee benefits related to pay increases ended throughout the summer.



## BRIGHT SPOTS

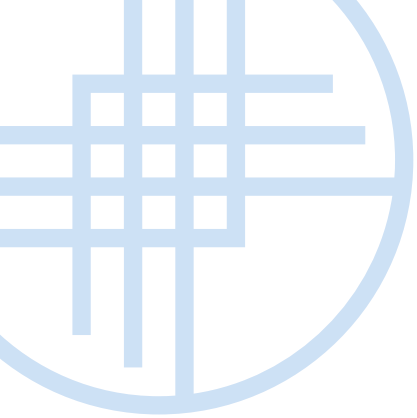
The following are examples of innovative cross-sector partnerships among several stakeholders. These bright spots are not an endorsement of one organization, company, or approach over another.

**H-E-B:**<sup>11</sup> In addition to a thorough emergency response plan and supporting its workforce with increased safety measures and a permanent \$2/hour pay increase, H-E-B recognized that "innovation and flexibility were keys to succeeding during the challenges created by COVID-19." The Texas-based grocery chain partnered with local businesses to increase transportation and delivery services, and stores sold ready-made meals from restaurant partners. All proceeds from the sales of these chef-prepared meals went directly to the restaurants and, in several cases, allowed restaurants to rehire their furloughed staff.



**DoorDash:**<sup>12</sup> As part of Project DASH, DoorDash partnered with United Way Worldwide, which serves 95 percent of communities across the United States. The Ride United Last-Mile Delivery initiative addresses transportation needs, using United Way's 211 service and DoorDash's logistics platform and community of Dashers. Since April, 100,000 boxes of food and household supplies have been delivered to at-risk and food-insecure homes in 175 communities.<sup>13</sup> Further philanthropic partnership with the Rockefeller Foundation, the Albertsons Companies Foundation, and the Why Not You Foundation expanded the successful pilot to more communities.





## Policy Responses

Policy responses tracked in the Inventory varied in scope, jurisdiction, and strategy, yet most offered either financial relief, new flexibilities (including the designation of authority), or adjustments to existing foodservice operations. These broad-reaching policies provided integral support to the food system to absorb and accommodate the pandemic's challenges. Of the 58 federal policies tracked, most focused on providing immediate, fast-acting aid to the industries in the food system hurt most by stay-at-home orders, in addition to providing flexibility and designating authority to states. Existing and novel public-private partnerships implemented many of these immediate aid initiatives. The 11 state and local policies tracked focused more on adjusting food service operations to maintain safety, access, and affordability. Several localities took the following actions:

- established a temporary cap on food delivery commissions to help restaurants,
- set price caps to ensure food affordability,
- mandated food operation closures to abide by public health precautions, and
- offered additional financial relief to aid emergency assistance.

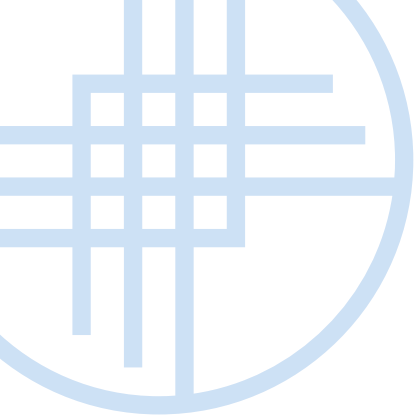
**The USDA Partnership with the Baylor Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty, McLane Global, PepsiCo, and others exemplify how innovative public-private partnerships play a role in the country's federal coronavirus response.** This partnership established Emergency Meals-to-You, which delivers food boxes to students in a limited number of rural schools that are currently closed to help curb the spread of COVID-19.

These deliveries were initially intended to serve nearly 1 million nutritious meals per week, but due to unprecedented need, this

program rapidly expanded to serve nearly 5 million meals per week.<sup>14</sup> This innovative program has received ample praise for

improving access to nourishment in rural communities, which often face unique food security challenges due to their geographic spread.<sup>15</sup>





**Figure 4: COVID-19 Policy Response Timeline, March - July, 2020**

## **FAMILIES FIRST CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE ACT (FFCRA)**

**Signed into law on March 18, 2020**

To keep federal nutrition assistance programs running efficiently and safely, waived certain in-person programmatic requirements, food-package sizes, and increased availability of meal sites.

- \$400 million for TEFAP
- \$500 million for WIC
- \$250 million for Older Americans Act food programs

## **CORONAVIRUS AID, RELIEF, AND ECONOMIC SECURITY (CARES) ACT**

**Signed into law on March 27, 2020**

Key provisions for the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), additional tax relief programs for restaurants and food-service employees, additional unemployment benefits and rebates to low and middle-income households.

- \$24 billion for domestic food programs,
- \$14 billion to replenish Commodity Credit Corporation
- \$9.5 billion dollar for new disaster relief program for specialty crop growers, livestock and dairy producers, and local food system suppliers.

## **\$484 BILLION CORONAVIRUS RELIEF PACKAGE**

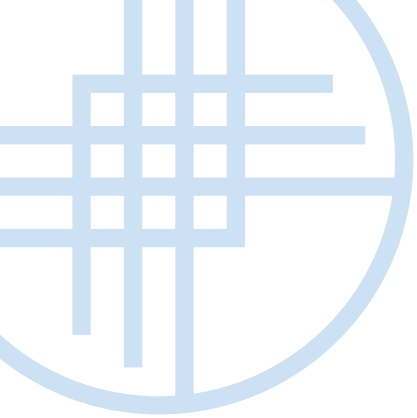
**Passed on April 24, 2020**

- \$310 billion for PPP
- \$60 billion for Small Business Administration

## **AUTHORITY GRANTED UNDER FFCRA FOR USDA TO CREATE FARMERS TO FAMILIES FOOD BOX PROGRAM.**

Although there were initial problems with implementation, **since May 15, 2020**, 100 million food boxes have been transported to food banks, community organizations, and other nonprofits.

*Source: Milken Institute analysis of USDA data (2020)*



# Recommendations

The learnings from the COVID-19 Food Response and Policy Inventory underscore how the power of partnerships—both new and established—benefited the response effort. The stakeholder interviews conducted for this report contributed the following best practices, insights, and key questions to consider. We recommend that food system stakeholders looking to craft impactful partnerships consider the following for a more nourishing, sustainable, and equitable food future:

## BUILD INNOVATIVE CROSS-SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS FOR BOTH IMMEDIATE IMPACT AND LONG-TERM RESILIENCY

*"We want to change the food system, but we can't do that ourselves. We need to start working with others to make effective change that will last."*

— **Ocean Spray**

*"We realize there's no one-size-fits-all approach to addressing food access, and we work with our neighbors and community leaders in each region to find ways to make a positive impact locally."*

— **Gotham Greens**

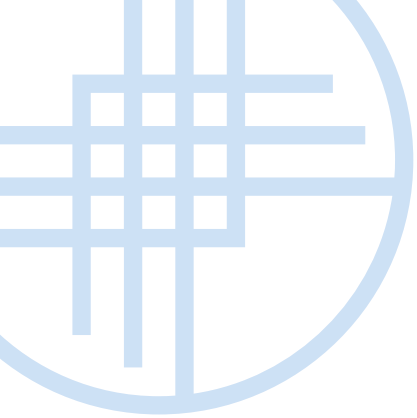
The private sector's flexibility enables it to leverage unique strengths to pilot innovative solutions before scaling unique approaches.

Because most emergency food system programs involve direct partnerships with the public sector, weaving together nonprofits and the private sector within the existing infrastructure increases the ability to anticipate, absorb, accommodate, or recover from challenges efficiently and sustainably.

Opening lines of communication between seemingly competitive stakeholders allows the private, nonprofit, and public sectors to quickly communicate more efficiently about the need and availability of resources in times of future crisis.

### Key questions to consider:

- What are the goals of each partner in this joint effort?
- What strengths does each partner bring to the relationship, and how can these be leveraged for a more significant impact?
- Are there additional cross-sector stakeholders or viewpoints that could enhance this work?



## PUT PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY THE MOST VULNERABLE, AT THE CENTER OF PARTNERSHIP EFFORTS

*"As a large manufacturer, we are able to ask, 'What do you need?' which may not be product alone."*

– **Danone North America**

*"The system's resilience depends on the resiliency of those who power it."*

– **IDEO**

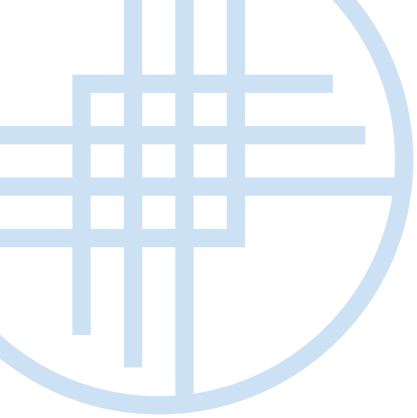
During COVID-19, our traditional understanding of vulnerable populations and essential workers expanded to include food system workers. The needs of restaurant, food manufacturer, farm, and grocery workers became both imperative to public health and intertwined with challenges related to the COVID-19 response.

Organizations should design solutions that address real needs by incorporating end-user and community voice to avoid working from assumptions.<sup>16</sup>

Best practices include surveying end users or the organizations that have a firm grasp of a community's interests and barriers.

### Key questions to consider:

- How are you incorporating community voices when building out partnerships or solutions?
- What assumptions are you making about the community with whom you are working?
- What metrics are you using to understand need when building partnerships?



## MAKE STRUCTURAL COMMITMENTS AND SUPPORT LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS TO BOLSTER EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE

*"Centering partnerships on how we work towards common goals and interests requires a lens of equity and inclusion."*

— **John Hancock**

*"As a company, we invest a lot of resources in solving technological and operational challenges relating to our business. We have a responsibility to apply our technology and expertise where it can make a difference on issues impacting the community."*

— **DoorDash**

For food systems to recover, public-private partnerships, investments, and donor grants need to span a longer timeframe for partner organizations to invest sustainably in programmatic work. Because private-sector organizations often have fixed budget allocation cycles, think about other creative responses to drive impact after funds have been distributed.

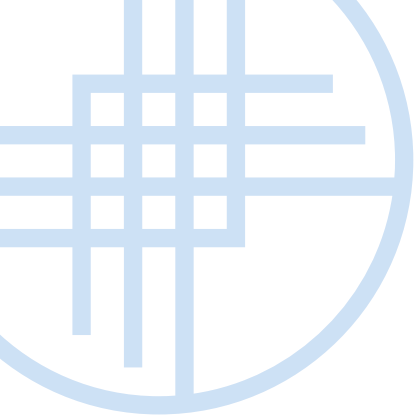
Plan and partner for the future. Companies and organizations that had already invested in partnership building and community engagement were better able to pivot as needed. Dedicate personnel and budget toward these initiatives to establish them as a priority.

When building partnerships, focus on mission and goal alignment to identify unique opportunities for a meaningful response, building on both organizations' strengths while continually collecting data to measure impact.

### Key questions to consider:

- **When considering partnerships, what role do you see yourself playing, and what kinds of support do you intend to provide?**
- **Have you dedicated resources specifically for building and maintaining impactful partnerships?**
- **How do you measure the impact of response efforts in the long term?**



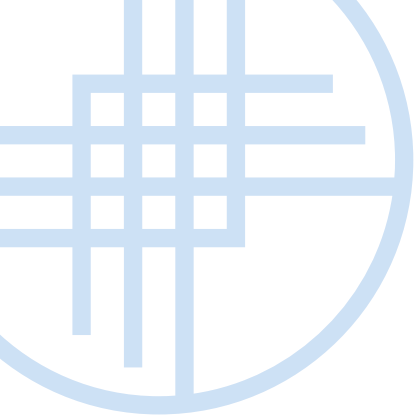


# Conclusion

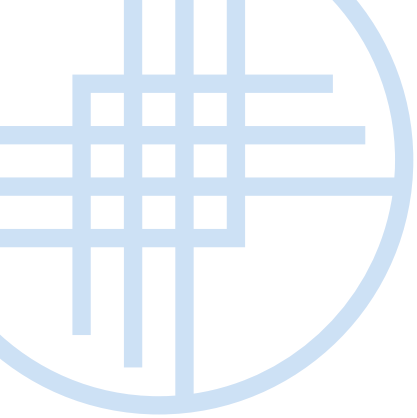
COVID-19 has shown that everyone from industry to government to nonprofits can play a role in creating and supporting a resilient food system. The swell of immediate responses showed the collective willingness to address the immediate need. Yet, after these initial injections of relief, the pandemic continues to disrupt society. As we move toward the next normal, we have the opportunity to decide what the future of our food system will be: **We are hungry for action that will realize a nourishing, sustainable food system for all.**

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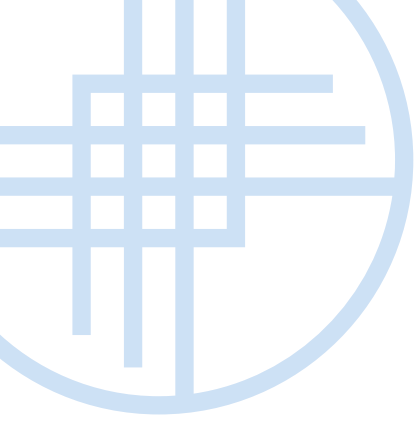
## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Though the entirety of views included in this report does not represent that of those mentioned, to the many experts from the private sector, nonprofits, academia, and our Milken Institute Center for Public Health Advisory Board members with whom we consulted, we appreciate your time and valuable input in helping us develop this report. Thank you to those we interviewed, including Danone North America, DoorDash, Gotham Greens, IDEO, John Hancock, and Ocean Spray, among others.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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