

# Wisconsin Farmers Union: New pandemic assistance package critical for overlooked farmers

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**CHIPPEWA FALLS** – The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) **announced** March 24 the creation of the Pandemic Assistance for Producers, a new initiative to offer financial assistance to farmers and ranchers affected by pandemic-related disruptions.

This endeavor will direct about \$6 billion towards new outreach and support programs, with a particular focus on parts of the food system that were overlooked in previous rounds of assistance. This includes small and socially disadvantaged producers, specialty crop and organic producers, producers of renewable fuel, and local and regional food processing facilities. Pre-existing pandemic programs like the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP), which will be umbrellaed under the initiative, will receive additional funding, as will several other permanent USDA programs.

“This initiative will help reach farmers who have previously been excluded from relief programs and keep them in business,” said WFU President Darin Von Ruden. “We appreciate the deftness with which USDA has worked to get pandemic relief distributed and their efforts to continue improving programs through this Pandemic Assistance for Producers initiative.”

WFU members declared *Pandemic Response and Recovery* a Special Order of Business for 2021, calling on Congress to oversee the implementation of economic recovery assistance for agriculture to ensure funding is distributed equally and fairly.”

Throughout the pandemic, National Farmers Union has **urged** USDA to ensure that aid is distributed “fairly and equitably” and that “payments are commensurate with demonstrated need.” In a statement, NFU President Rob Larew thanked the agency for reevaluating its methods and taking steps to serve farmers who were initially excluded.

“Federal assistance has been absolutely fundamental to the agriculture industry’s survival during the pandemic,” Larew said. “Unfortunately, as National Farmers Union has pointed out, some farmers – particularly those who are socially disadvantaged, run smaller operations, grow specialty crops, or sell into local and value-added markets – have been largely unable to access the help they need due to inadequate outreach and structural flaws. Because those producers already tend to lack financial security, we were concerned that the lack of support could lead to a wave of farm closures.”

WFU Government Relations Director Nick Levendofsky noted that the focus on ensuring relief is distributed equitably fits Farmers Union’s original motto from 1902, “to secure equity, establish justice and apply the golden rule.”

“Even 119 years ago we recognized that equity, justice and the golden rule were important to farmers. Today they are as critical as ever, as we weather the pandemic,” Levendofsky said. “Pandemic recovery and relief remain critical to our farmer members as they navigate the market shifts and uncertainty.”