

Gov. Newsom offers framework for reopening state

Without citing any specific time frames, California Governor Gavin Newsom unveiled a new decision-making framework that will eventually get children back to school, non-essential employees back to work and allow more businesses to operate.

He described the pathway as moving from surge, to suppression and ultimately on to herd immunity and to a vaccine. **“But in this transition where we do see light at the end of the tunnel, where there is a ray of optimism and hopefulness that this too shall pass.”** There were 758 COVID-19 related deaths in the state as of Tuesday.

Newsom made it very clear that the next phase is “perhaps the most difficult and challenging phase of all” and is one “where science, where public health, not politics, must be the guide.” And he warned his 40 million constituents that this is not the time to stop following the stay-at-home order for non-essential workers or taking other safety precautions.



California Gov. Gavin Newsom

“Please it’s incumbent upon all of us to continue to do the incredible work that you’ve done. I peril that we pull the trigger and pull the plug too early and no, we won’t do that,” he added.

California’s six indicators for modifying the stay-at-home order are:

- The ability to monitor and protect our communities through testing, contact tracing, isolating, and supporting those who are positive or exposed;

- The ability to prevent infection in people who are at risk for more severe COVID-19;
- The ability of the hospital and health systems to handle surges;
- The ability to develop therapeutics to meet the demand;
- The ability for businesses, schools, and child care facilities to support physical distancing; and
- The ability to determine when to reinstitute certain measures, such as the stay-at-home orders, if necessary.

“The most important framework is our capacity to expand our testing, to appropriately address the tracing and tracking of individuals, the isolation and the quarantine of individuals using technology and using a workforce that needs to be trained and an infrastructure that needs to be in place in order to begin the process to transition,” Newsom emphasized.

At some time in the future, Newsom said his team will offer baseline recommendations and guidance that will create a foundation and floor for expectations but that **“localism is determinative.**

“Because of the scale and scope of California, because of the geographic distances, because the rural and urban construct, because of density of population and also density of spread being so distinct and unique in different parts of the state, yes, we’ll be guided by local decision making,” he emphasized.

Newsom said “things will look different” when he eventually begins to ease the stay-at-home order. Restaurants, for one, may have to cut the seating capacity by half to spread out customers, he said. Waiters may wear gloves and masks and check temperatures as customers enter.

Newsom was asked about the prospect for summer gatherings like fairs and Fourth of July celebrations. **For farmers and others who supply trade shows, conferences, and other large venues,** Newsom said large-scale events are “not in the cards based upon our current guidelines and current expectations.”

“The prospect of mass gatherings is negligible at best until we get to herd immunity and we get to a vaccine,” Newsom added in response to a reporter’s question, while noting that large events in June, July, and August are unlikely.

Newsom does want schools to return in the fall, potentially bringing back more milk sales in school lunches. But schools may be staggering the students, with some coming in during the morning and others in the afternoon, he said.

Five questions for a hospital chef at the center of the COVID-19 crisis

As executive chef for food services for the UC Davis Medical Center, Santana Diaz has implemented a “farm-to-fork” approach by sourcing directly from local farmers.

The hospital has also been at the center of the COVID-19 pandemic, as it treated the nation’s first patient infected by community spread. Diaz immediately implemented a series of backup plans, including partnering with local chefs to take over in case he fell ill, while also helping those restaurants to feed the needy during the crisis.

Previously the executive chef for the Golden 1 Center and for hotels, Diaz shared with *Agri-Pulse* how hospitals can provide farmers with more reliability year-round and reduce their market risks. The conversation has been edited for brevity and clarity.

1. How are you and your staff managing during this crisis?

Thank you for asking. The staff has been more than adaptable.

UC is offering all of its employees emergency approved leaves. It's for our employees to be able to take time off if they were to come down with any symptoms related to COVID-19. They'd be able to stay home for 16 days.

It's a great benefit, but we started looking at what that does to our workforce. With some people going home, it causes some other logistics that were not foreseen. All these other things that were outside of the hospital that impacted our staff, like childcare, became another thing we needed to address.

Of course, our last line of defense is always going to be serving our patient care. That's the number one priority. As we look at how the patient bed count fluctuates daily, we need to be able to account for what that means, whether we're down five extra cooks or five extra food service workers that day or not.

I don't know how many cooks could potentially be out next week.

There's been some contingencies that we've been able to flex with. Everybody's been pretty spot on with jumping into these contingency plans.

We've done a refresher course for every one of our cooks who doesn't work the tray line to get familiar with that. I have some cooks that have been here for 20 years. But the last time they worked the patient care tray line may have been when they were first hired.

2. Can you explain how you source directly from farmers?

The benefit of being in a high-volume institution for procurement and food purchasing is we're able to communicate to our produce vendor which farm to go to, because our volume is at a capacity that warrants the demand.

Produce Express can go pick up a pallet of asparagus from Capay Valley and they can sell that through their program as well as with us being a large client – and their business is hurt tremendous because they don't have any restaurants or casinos to deliver to anymore.



Chef Santana Diaz (Photo: UC Davis)

We actually have a contingency A, B, C and D plans for what we will do in certain situations, if we go further than Plan B.

With the farmers, I know a lot of them are heavy on product because there aren't the access points out there anymore. We're just trying to plan the best we can and let them know we're going to be there as much as we can. But our volume is actually reduced a little as well, since we don't have the visitors coming through to the hospital.

There's another contingency plan in my back pocket that I have with some of the chefs in town (from the Sacramento restaurants Canon, Mulvaney's and Waterboy). We have them going through all the testing and security clearances to come and volunteer here.

I had to do a contingency plan on myself. What if I got sick? What if I and my two executive sous chefs contacted COVID were out for two weeks?

It's a good showing of community relationships and partnerships, just like how they are (helping feed the needy while their restaurants are closed). We were able to support that with equipment. We're helping them out by giving them the racks and dollies needed to move the product from their restaurants to their transit system for getting those meals delivered.

There is always this relationship between our culinary program and the chefs in our community, and it really comes into fruition here.

3. Normally, how does direct purchasing help farmers reduce risk?

It would help the farmer if they always knew how much they should be planting. There are only about three asparagus farmers left in the Delta region. It is a high-cost, high-labor crop that's cut by hand. But I could tell a farmer we need 9000 pounds to get through the spring months when asparagus is in season. That farmer can look at what they planted, with their potential yield per acre, and say yes, or plant more. We can also agree to what that cost is.

Cherry season pops up right around the same time. If farmworkers get offered \$2 more an hour, they are going to stop cutting asparagus and go pick cherries. The asparagus farmer can't keep them because he doesn't know if he even has a product that's going to yield any money, since he doesn't know his end buyer.

A lot of farmers at that point will disk under their crop and the next season they'll grow something else with less risk. That's how we've got so few farmers growing asparagus. Now we can bring agriculture back to the area.

(Along with schools, the Golden 1 Center arena and some restaurants) we can stabilize the market and have our community dictate the market, versus the market dictating.

4. How is providing food for a hospital different from other large venues?

Our CEO at UC Davis Health had this idea to bring a farm to fork program to the hospital. Somehow my name got tossed in the ring. I was going to stay with sports. It wasn't until it was seriously talked about by the executive leadership for having healthy, local food at an institution

that maybe doesn't have the best stigma for being known for serving great food. Changing that whole thought process, the difference for me is night and day.

It gives me a value to what I've learned through the years through large-scale entities and productions – like Levi's Stadium, Golden 1 Center and hotels – and apply it to something I can stand behind and is for a good reason. We're helping people get from an ill state to a healthy state.

5. Any other thoughts to share?

Every day, I'm anticipating something to be changing with a contingency plan somewhere.

Who knows how food looks in general for our community in the future? I'm worried about all the restaurants even opening up after this whole thing is done. Is the CDC going to change the policies on how salad bars are offered? Or how many hands can touch the foods we're serving in our cafes at the hospital?

I'm constantly trying to keep an open mind and keep positive.

We're taking it literally a day at a time. Hopefully, the worst doesn't happen, and we don't experience a surge. But if we do, we're prepared to make sure that all of our patient care services and staff are taken care of.

Compost order gets an update, gains broad support

The State Water Resources Control Board has approved revisions to a Compost Order, easing restrictions for dairy farmers on a conservation practice that has taken center stage with the administration.

“Composting is such an important piece to our effort in California to increase carbon sequestration in the soils,” said Noelle Cremers, regulatory affairs director for the Wine Institute, during a meeting of the board last week. “So, removing any unnecessary barriers is really important.”

Growers had complained the 2015 water quality regulation was not clear on exemptions for agricultural operations. More confusion was created when the Central Valley Water Board passed its East San Joaquin Order in 2018, which had less stringent requirements for water discharged from composting practices.

“Though staff assured me that agriculture has always been exempt, you wouldn't know it from reading the original order,” said Dave Runsten, policy director at the Community Alliance of

Family Farmers. “Farmers who were thinking of making on-farm compost told us they were fearful the regulation would make it infeasible and too costly.”

Water Board Vice Chair Dorene D'Adamo acknowledged that the “one-size-fits-all approach” was not working.

The revision also expanded the exemption to include feedstocks, such as manure, that are shared between agricultural operations. It also added composting as a recommended best management practice, which Runstein said his farmers found feasible and that it would encourage more farmers to compost.

The State Water Board and CDFG have worked collaboratively to promote composting as part of a Healthy Soils initiative, which has been detailed in a memorandum of understanding between the two agencies.

“Last fall, we joined forces as an interagency team and launched an on-farm composting work group,” explained CDFG Undersecretary Jenny Lester Moffit. “That group has identified many different areas to look at how we can scale up composting.”

Ryan Flaherty, who focuses on business partnerships at Sustainable Conservation, said the nonprofit group started engaging in the revision process when they realized the impact this practice could have on reducing dairy nitrates that leach into groundwater.

“We know that many dairies have excess manure that needs to be transported off of the dairy to protect the water quality,” he said. “There are very few options currently for dairies to transport that excess manure to reduce their nitrate loading to groundwater, and composting happens to be one of those few.”

In the Water Board’s first online meeting since Gov. Newsom issued a lockdown order to mitigate the COVID-19 crisis, the board unanimously approved the revision, to the praise of several stakeholder groups.

“We believe these revisions will allow growers throughout California to create compost for beneficial uses in an economically sustainable way,” said Sunshine Saldivar, an environmental law analyst for the California Farm Bureau Federation.



The State Water Board met for the first time online. Pictured on top is Chair Joaquin Esquivel.

Ag districts get focus in battle for Congress

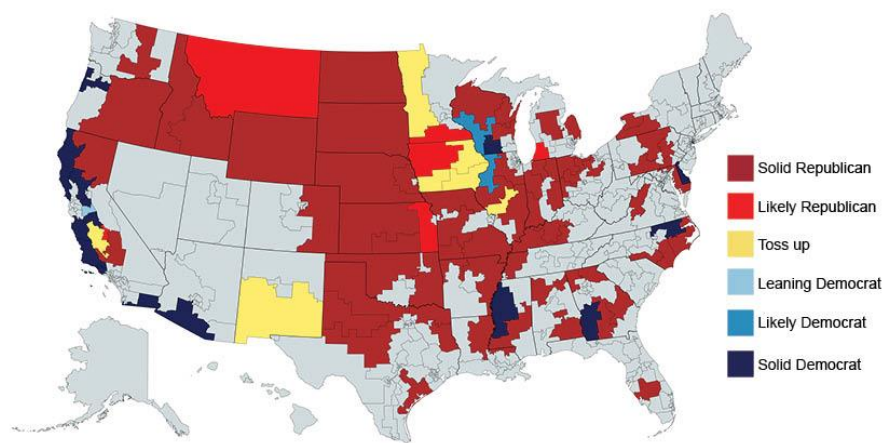
If Republicans have any hope of winning control of the U.S. House this fall, they'll have to start by winning a series of major agricultural districts Democrats won in 2018.

Of the top 100 House districts in terms of farm production, seven are rated as toss-ups by the Cook Political Report. **Six of the seven are held by Democrats, including House Agriculture Committee Chairman Collin Peterson's 7th District seat in Minnesota.** The influential chairmanship is held in high regard - a title he could retain unless the House flips back to Republican.

The lone Republican tossup seat belongs to Rep. Rodney Davis, whose 13th District in central Illinois includes the university towns of Champaign and Urbana as well as swath of one of the nation's most productive corn and soybean-growing regions.

Three of the tossup ag seats are next door in Iowa, including seats that first-term Reps. Cindy Axne and Abby Finkenauer won in 2018 by ousting GOP incumbents. The third Iowa seat is being vacated by Democratic Rep. Dave Loebsack.

Ag districts pivotal in battle for Congress



Source: www.cookpolitical.com

The two other tossup seats are in California and New Mexico. **In California's 21st District, which ranks fourth nationally in farm revenue according to the latest Agriculture Department census, first-term Rep. TJ Cox faces a rematch with Republican David Valadao, whom Cox ousted in 2018.**

In New Mexico's 2nd District, which covers the southern half of the state, first-term Democratic Rep. Xochitl Torres Small will face the winner of the June 2 GOP primary. The GOP candidates include Claire Chase, an oil industry executive from Roswell whose family are pecan producers.

Democrats currently control the House 232-196, with one independent, former GOP Rep. Justin Amash of Michigan. There are six vacancies, four of which were held by Republicans. Republicans need to pick up 18 seats in November and hold the four vacant seats to get the 218 necessary to win control of the House, making the seven pivotal ag seats top priorities for both parties.

President Donald Trump carried six of those seven seats in 2016. The lone exception was the California district, which Hillary Clinton won with 55% of the vote.

Dennis Goldford, a political science professor at Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa, says that the House races will be a referendum on Trump as well as on how well the first-term Democrats have solidified support in their districts.

“That first reelection bid is crucial,” he said. “If a person can get through that first reelection bid in the House or Senate, that person is usually in pretty good shape to get reelected.” Here’s a closer look at the seven races:

CALIFORNIA 21 — The Central Valley district sprawls across a largely rural western portion of the Central Valley and includes part of Bakersfield and a portion of Fresno County outside the city.



Rep. TJ Cox, D-Calif.

Valadao, who represented the district for three terms, lost his reelection bid to Cox by 862 votes in 2018, and Cox got a seat on the House Agriculture Committee, where he has emphasized the needs of the district’s prodigious specialty crop sector.

But Valadao had \$1.1 million in his campaign account as of Feb. 12, compared to Cox's \$861,953, and there were media reports last month that Cox owes the state of California about \$30,000 in back taxes. He blames a former business partner for the problem.

Still, this is the one major ag district where Trump could be a drag. Trump received less than 40% of the vote in the district in 2016, and Barack Obama defeated Mitt Romney there by 55% to 44% in 2012.

Ag importance: Ranked fourth in U.S. ag sales in 2017. \$2 billion in net cash farm income, accounts for 22% of California farm revenue. Major commodities: almonds, grapes, vegetables, dairy, cattle.

IOWA 1 — Finkenauer, who ousted Republican Rod Blum in 2018, in the district that occupies the northwest portion of Iowa, including the cities of Cedar Rapids, Dubuque and Waterloo, will face the winner of the June 2 GOP primary. The GOP candidates include Ashley Hinson, state House member and former Cedar Rapids TV anchor, and Thomas Hansen, a businessman and organic beef producer.

Finkenauer, like Cindy Axne in the 3rd District, has tried to pay attention to her district’s needs, according to Goldford. Both of them came under heavy pressure from Republicans and farm groups to support the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement, which they ultimately did.

Trump carried all three of the tossup Iowa districts by a similar margin, 49% to 45%. A Des Moines Register poll posted in March indicated likely voters would narrowly favor a generic Republican house candidate in all three districts this time. In the 1st District, voters said they favored a Republican 49% to 46%.

Ag importance: Ranks 12th in U.S. ag sales. \$1.6 billion in net cash farm income, 21% of state's farm revenue. Top commodities: corn and soybeans

IOWA 2 — Rita Hart, a former teacher who runs a 200-acre farm with her husband, will be the Democratic candidate in the race to succeed Dave Loebsack, who is retiring from Congress after seven terms representing the southeast Iowa district that includes Davenport, Burlington and Iowa City, home of the University of Iowa.

The GOP field for the June primary includes state Sen. Mariannette Miller-Meeks, an ophthalmologist, and Bobby Schilling, a former Illinois congressman. Miller-Meeks ran unsuccessfully against Loebsack in 2008, 2010 and 2014. In the closest race, she lost by 51% to 46% in 2010.

Hart, a former state senator who ran unsuccessfully for lieutenant governor in 2018, had \$647,771 on hand at the beginning of the year, compared to \$214,744 for Miller-Meeks and \$49,744 for Schilling.

In the 2nd District, the Des Moines Register poll said voters favored electing a GOP House candidate 49% to 41%.

Ag importance: Ranks 18th in U.S. ag sales. \$1.1 billion in net cash farm income, 15% of state's farm revenue. Top commodities: corn, soybean and hogs.

IOWA 3 — Former GOP Rep. David Young is trying to win back the seat that he lost to Axne in 2018. Young won 15 of the district's 16 counties. The problem for him is that the 16th county is Polk, home to Des Moines and suburbs. Suburban voters there, as well as elsewhere in the country, turned on Republicans in 2018, and Young needs to win some back.

Axne, a member of the House Ag Committee, won't carry the rural counties in the district that stretches to the state of Missouri on the south and the Missouri River on the west, but she does need to hold down Young's margins there, said Goldford.

Young said he lost Polk County by only 271 votes in 2016 and needs GOP voters to turn out there in November. "The rural areas are going back our way. People are coming home," he said.



Rep. Cindy Axne, D-Iowa

In November, she went to the House floor to prod House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to accelerate consideration of USMCA, citing the benefits to farmers in Iowa. "They are asking for our help as elected representatives," she said. "We must answer their call and get this deal done right and without unnecessary delay."

In Axne's district, voters narrowly favor electing a GOP House candidate 43% to 42%, according to the Des Moines Register poll.

Ag importance: Ranks 33rd in U.S. ag sales. \$733 million in net cash farm income, 9% of state's farm revenue. Top commodities: corn, soybeans and layers.

ILLINOIS 13 — Republican Rodney Davis faces a rematch with Betsy Dirksen Londrigan, an adviser to nonprofit groups, who lost to him by just over 2,000 votes in 2018.

Davis and Londrigan each had about \$1.3 million on hand at the beginning of the year.

Trump carried the district 50% to 44% after Obama and Romney virtually tied in 2012.

Davis "scores really well in all the rural areas of his district but Champaign, Urbana and Springfield are trouble spots for him and will make the race close because they are liberal areas with a lot of votes," said Leon Corzine, a former president of the National Corn Growers Association who farms in the district. Corzine says that Trump's support should help Davis win reelection unless the economy fails to recover sufficiently from the COVID-19 crisis, Corzine said.

Londrigan, who argues that health care will be the overarching issue in the race, has used the pandemic to press the need for health care improvements and has called for Trump to reopen enrollment in the Affordable Care Act.

Ag importance: Ranks 55th in U.S. ag sales. \$609 million in net cash farm income, 11% of state's farm revenue. Top commodities: Corn and soybeans.

MINNESOTA 7 — Peterson, under pressure from ag groups, is running for a 16th term in a district that has become increasingly Republican. Trump carried by 62% to 31% in 2016 and Mitt Romney won with 54% of the vote in 2012.

Peterson's opponent in 2016 and 2018, Dave Hughes, is running in the Aug. 11 primary, but Peterson could have a higher profile GOP challenger this time in former Lt. Gov. Michelle Fischbach.

Peterson has long been one of the most moderate members of the Democratic caucus and is widely respected by Aggies from both parties. But Fischbach — a former state Senate president who had to serve as lieutenant governor when the previous officeholder, Tina Smith, was appointed to the U.S. Senate — is trying to tie him to the national party.

Peterson announced his plans last month to run for reelection, saying that he feared that "rural America is getting left behind" due to the decline in the number of rural Democrats. But Fischbach said his district would reject Peterson "and the socialist policies of open borders, free health care for illegal immigrants, taxpayer-funded abortion, and mandatory gun buyback programs that his preferred presidential candidate supports."



House Ag Committee Chair Collin Peterson, D-Minn.

Peterson's future is even cloudier in 2022 even if he wins reelection. Minnesota is expected to lose a House seat after the 2020 census, and that is expected to result in consolidation of the state's rural districts.

Peterson had \$1 million on hand at the beginning of the year compared to \$272,118 for another Republican candidate, Noel Collis, and \$203,688 for Fischbach.

Ag importance: Ranks sixth in U.S. ag sales. \$2.3 billion in net cash farm income, 49% of state's farm revenue. Top commodities: Corn, wheat, soybeans, sugar, hogs, dairy, cattle and turkeys.

NEW MEXICO 2 — Rep. Xochitl Torres Small, who says her district, which occupies the southern half of the state, is its “agricultural engine.” She was named to the House Ag Committee in February after Rep. Jeff Van Drew switched to the Republican Party.

In addition to Claire Chase, an oil industry executive who hails from a family of pecan producers, the GOP candidates in the June primary include former state lawmaker Yvette Herrell and businessman Chris Mathys.

Torres Small has proven to be a strong fundraiser. She had \$2.3 million on hand at the beginning of the year compared to \$588,519 for Chase, \$463,846 for Herrell and \$200,159 for Mathys.

Trump carried the district 50 to 40% in 2016. Romney carried it 52 to 45% in 2012. Republican Steve Pearce held the seat from 2003 to 2009 and from 2011 to 2019, but ran unsuccessfully for governor in 2018.

Ag importance: Ranks 69th in U.S. ag sales. \$250 million in net cash farm income, 61% of state's farm revenue. Top commodity: Dairy and pecans.

Senators push for assistance for specialty crop producers

Senators Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., and Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich., led 27 additional senators on a bipartisan letter [calling on Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue](#) to ensure that specialty crop producers receive financial assistance from losses caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

“The *Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act* established a \$9.5 billion disaster fund and specifically included producers of specialty crops as eligible for assistance,” the senators wrote. “As USDA specifies how this assistance will be provided, we ask that you ensure that specialty crop producers receive assistance that is commensurate with the losses they are facing.”

The fresh produce industry has experienced \$5 billion in losses from coronavirus, with additional losses expected in the coming months. Producers are also facing increased costs in order to meet social distancing requirements and adequately protect their workers from coronavirus, on top of existing challenges with trade.

The senators urged the USDA to provide direct payments to eligible producers for lost revenue and increased production costs related to COVID-19.

“As USDA considers allocations of these funds, we ask that USDA take into account losses as a result of coronavirus that are incurred beyond the designated health emergency timeframe. Farmers with peak harvest crops in the summer and fall also face considerable uncertainty so accurately accounting for and addressing those losses will be critical,” the senators wrote.

To immediately reduce the inventory of product and stabilize prices, they also asked that USDA purchase fresh and processed specialty crops for redistribution to food banks, schools, and emergency feeding organizations.

“Farmers have lost contracts with schools and restaurants, schools that are continuing to serve fresh product have substantially reduced their orders, and producers are experiencing challenges exporting product, all of which have contributed to surplus inventories,” they noted. Click for the full text of the [letter](#)

Creative solutions sought to handle food aid crisis

With unemployment spiking across the country as a result of the coronavirus, more and more people who never needed food assistance before are looking for help, forcing food banks, commodity groups and USDA to think creatively about how to meet the [growing demand](#).

Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue may announce as early this week how he plans to spend the \$9.5 billion in the recent coronavirus stimulus bill relief to help struggling farmers, ranchers, the dairy industry and local food systems. He also has \$6 billion in Commodity Credit Corporation funding to use until July, when the borrowing authority will be replenished to the tune of \$14 billion.

Perdue has not made any public proclamations about how the money will be used, although he [said](#) at a recent press conference that the department had difficulty last year in finding a home for \$50 million in milk purchases.

The issue, Perdue said, was a lack of cold storage at food banks for perishable items such as milk. Feeding America, an organization with 200-member food banks nationwide, expects to receive results a survey of its members this week on storage capacity and other issues.

Suggestions for how to spend the newly available money have come from many quarters of the industry, including fruit and vegetable growers from California to Florida who are seeking \$5 billion in assistance, and the dairy industry, which has laid out a [plan](#) asking the federal government to “use every financial tool in its arsenal to bring balance to the dairy industry as quickly as possible.”

Produce industry groups asked USDA to streamline its vendor approval process and "expeditiously facilitate fresh produce commodity purchases, separate from existing purchasing programs, for redistribution to food banks, schools, and other emergency feeding sites."



Dale Moore, American Farm Bureau Federation

“We’re all full of advice right now,” says Dale Moore, executive vice president of the American Farm Bureau Federation and a longtime Washington hand, who expects Perdue to announce his intentions this week.

One idea floated by AFBF and Feeding America in a letter to Perdue is a program that would allow food banks to use vouchers to cover food purchasing and processing and distribution costs.

Moore said Tuesday he had “an encouraging phone call” with a USDA official about the program, though he cautioned that what USDA comes up with “may not look anything like we proposed.”

The key, Moore said, is for USDA to keep the process as simple as possible so struggling producers can efficiently deliver nutrition where it’s needed most.

Vouchers could be used to buy dairy and other foods and get them processed into consumer-friendly packaging, he said. They even could be used to rent cold storage.

Food distribution is changing rapidly due to COVID, forcing Feeding America to keep going back to its network to gauge its capacity for both storage and distribution.

Carrie Calvert, FA’s vice president of government relations for food and agriculture, said her group’s survey “is meant to get an idea of the amount of food the food banks can accept.”

“Although shelf stable is easiest, they are still distributing perishable food,” Calvert said. “The key is to make sure the deliveries are more frequent and sized to fit the refrigeration and freezer capacity we have on hand, and to provide additional resources to increase that refrigeration and freezer capacity.”

Milk producers have been dumping product because of oversupply resulting from the drying up of traditional outlets such as food service and schools. Produce growers who have allowed vegetables to rot in their fields are in the same boat.

“This is such a unique circumstance that it really does require some unique thinking and some creative thinking,” says former Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, head of the U.S. Dairy Export Council and a board member at Feeding America. One possibility, he said, is for refrigerated tankers to pull up to food banks and distribute milk that way.

Alan Bjerga, senior vice president for communications at the National Milk Producers Federation, says “capacity solutions are being worked on in real-time so that food banks are equal to the challenges they are facing. Dairy farmers are ready to meet this demand.”

For food banks with adequate cold storage, additional deliveries of milk are not a problem. One such operator in Florida is saying, in essence: bring it on.

Dave Krepcho, president and CEO of Second Harvest Food Bank of Central Florida, has 100,000 cubic feet of cold storage, but says the milk “moves very quickly so storage isn’t a major issue for us.”

He acknowledges that “you might get a different answer on storage from other food banks,” but at Second Harvest, which also has refrigerated trucks, “We can handle what’s coming our way.”

Krepcho says he’s also “getting a lot more food from Florida farmers — we’re trying to capture as much as we can here.” People love the fresh produce, he says.

Demand has nearly doubled at Second Harvest, Krepcho says, to the point where the food bank is providing enough food for 250,000 people a day. “It’s unreal,” he says.

In addition to recently enacted legislation, USDA can use existing purchasing authorities such as its Section 32 nutrition assistance program and a 2018 trade mitigation program to buy commodities.

Those purchases “can keep processors running and sustain supply chains farmers rely on to sell their milk,” Bjerga said. “They also send important demand signals to markets, which can raise dairy prices and, in the end, reduce the cost of assistance to the federal government.”

USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service won’t discuss future purchases, but it has continued to solicit bids under those programs.

AMS said that on an ongoing basis, it collaborates with the department's Food and Nutrition Service to buy and distribute over \$2 billion of U.S. agricultural products for schools, food banks, tribal organizations and other domestic and international food outlets.

“Trade mitigation and Section 32 purchases recently have increased annual spending to about \$4 billion, with the majority of the extra product going to food banks,” the spokesperson said.

Moore said he sympathizes with Perdue and his team at USDA, who are working to flesh out the details of their aid package, which is eagerly anticipated by the agriculture industry. And in future, “Should there be a need for more resources. I feel confident we’re all going to be pulling on our oars together,” he said.



Carrie Calvert, Feeding America

Got vegetable seeds? Consider yourself lucky as home gardens soar

You've likely heard about the panic buying of toilet paper, flour and milk in grocery stores as the COVID-19 pandemic exploded in the U.S. But another interesting trend has been happening online and in retail outlets across the country: Vegetable seeds are selling like crazy.

"We are talking about triple the demand overnight," says Wayne Gale, president of Stokes Seeds, a major distributor of vegetable and flower seeds in Canada and the Northeastern United States. He also serves as chairman of the American Seed Trade Association. About 10% of Stokes's business is for home gardeners, while the other 90% is for commercial growers.



Wayne Gale, president of Stokes Seeds and Chair of the American Seed Trade Association

Gale says it's primarily the firm's home garden business that has skyrocketed -mostly vegetable seed but also some flower seed -while they protect his commercial growers. His workers, who have been deemed "essential" by the Department of Homeland Security during the pandemic, are working hard to keep up with the demand.

"I've never seen anything like this," both in Canada and the U.S., Gale says, as consumers resort to panic buying.

"People see shortages in the grocery store and figure they may continue," Gale adds.

Jamie Mattikow, CEO of the online seed retailer Burpee, says his firm has seen similar trends, although the Pennsylvania-based company doesn't share internal numbers.

"That being said, this year's performance has been incredibly strong. We were growing at high double digits heading into March; over the last four weeks, we are up a multiple of that," Mattikow explains.

"The biggest increase has been in vegetables, which have taken on a greater interest among consumers, with consistent gains across all our channels of sale — both retail and online."

Burpee, which ships seeds, live plants, fruit, garden supplies and more, temporarily placed a hold on new online orders until April 15.

So, what's driving the increase? As President Donald Trump has described the fight to slow the spread of



Burpee web site advises customers of order delays.

COVID-19 as “our big war,” some consumers are hearkening back to World Wars I and II when governments encouraged their citizens to grow their own food in times of scarcity. These “Victory Gardens” were also envisioned as a morale booster for those who wanted to contribute to the war effort.

Diane Blazek, Executive Director of the National Garden Bureau, believes the dramatic increase in sales is strongly related to COVID-19.

“We saw a surge in vegetable gardening during the 2008-2009 recession, but it didn't drop off all that much in subsequent years. Now it's taken a huge leap.”

Blazek says she’s heard her members categorize seed buyers into three groups: Returning buyers (the ones who order every year), returning but inactive for several years, or brand new, who want to try gardening for the first time.

Blazek says the “seed rush” is primarily for vegetables but “herbs are way up there and flowers, too. We think many people now realize you need pollinator-friendly flowers to go along with the vegetables. Plus, many people are gardening for the mental health, so they want their surroundings to be pretty and calming.”



Screenshot showing out-of-stock offerings from Gurney's Seed & Nursery Co.

Seed companies are quick to note that they have plenty of supply, but not necessarily of the most popular varieties or seed packet sizes, due to the early rush on purchases. For example, a packet of 30 seeds may be hard to come by, but a 3-lb bag of seeds may still be available. In some cases, it’s just a matter of time before companies catch up with orders.

The same type of delay is often the case with live plants as growers try to navigate uncertainties over product demand and labor.

Lisa Branco is the general manager of Radicle Seed Company, headquartered in Gilroy, CA, and also the sales manager at a sister company, Headstart Nursery which serves the western US. She reports higher sales for vegetables, with growers “looking for farmers market/home garden type projects.”

On the transplant side of things, she says business continues to go on, however a lot of commercial growers on the conventional side are cutting back due to decreased demand from the food service industry.

Gale says some commercial growers have also been cautious due to the uncertainty of foreign worker availability.

“Horticulture is very labor intensive, unlike field crops that are highly mechanical. You need a lot of hands to plant, care, harvest, grade and pack vegetables. We have one customer with 500 foreign workers to maintain their business,” says Gale.

One of the nation’s largest vegetable plant providers for consumers says business is booming.

“We aren’t going to have any shortages,” says Joan Casanova, spokesperson for Bonnie Plants based in Union Springs, Ala. The firm has over 75 growing facilities, a fleet of trucks and, during a normal season sells “hundreds of millions of plants.” She says their vegetable plants, which are sold in retail outlets nationwide, have been “flying off the shelves.” In some cases, “Big Box” stores that are being restocked seven days a week can still sell out in one day.

Casanova says in some cases, people are buying entire flats of tomato plants, rather than just one or two, and not realizing that the harvest will provide much more than they need. During this uncertain time, Casanova says growing your own food represents a phenomenal combination.

“People want to control something in their food supply and they are concerned about food security,” Casanova adds. “I don’t know of any other product that can both sustain nutrition as well as alleviate stress.”

News Briefs:

Hearing scheduled in Roundup case appeal. A hearing has been scheduled for San Francisco June 2 in an appeal of the first Roundup cancer case to go to trial.

A state court jury awarded school groundskeeper Dewayne Lee Johnson \$289 million in August 2018 in his case against Monsanto, finding the company had failed to warn him of the dangers of exposure to the glyphosate-based herbicide. The judge reduced that amount to \$78 million.

Monsanto, bought by Bayer in 2018, contends on appeal that the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act preempts California law, meaning that EPA “would have rejected Monsanto’s request” to a state-required warning label.

The case was the first of thousands of claims made against the product. Bayer and attorneys for thousands of plaintiffs have reportedly been negotiating a settlement, but talks have stalled recently.

DPR recommends alternative PPEs during shortage. Recognizing the COVID-19 crisis is leading to a shortage of N95 masks, gloves and other personal protective equipment needed for applying some pesticides, the Department of Pesticide Regulation has compiled a list of alternatives.

Some respirators provide more protection. DPR also suggests using products that don’t require PPE, using an enclosed system or applying from an enclosed cab.

The department is also offering glove safety tips, such as caring for reusable gloves.

Report: Market risk higher for dairy and specialty crops in 2020. Exposure to market risk in 2020 is expected to be higher for dairy and specialty crop producers than other commodities, according to a quarterly report obtained by *Agri-Pulse*.

Farmer Mac is expected to release its quarterly economic report later this week. Farmer Mac Chief Economist Jackson Takach told *Agri-Pulse* pivoting from a restaurant and wholesale focus is very difficult for dairy and specialty crop sectors grappling with COVID-19.

“If you’re packaging up ten-pound bags of cheese, it’s a very different structure, very different market, very different supply chain than if you are doing eight-ounce bags for grocery sales,” he said.

As soon as schools and restaurants closed, Takach said a lot of milk and cheese produced at a very large volume had nowhere to go, causing dairy producers to be forced into dumping milk. Because dairy producers receive a higher proportion of their income from cash receipts, they have a relatively higher exposure to market price risk compared to other producers, the report noted. Takach said specialty crop producers across the Southeast as well as California are seeing the same logistical and supply chain problems because a lot of fresh fruits and vegetables sold to schools, restaurants, and hotels can’t be immediately changed to sell in grocery stores.

When it comes to expenses, commodities will face differing pressures. Labor-intensive specialty crop producers will see expenses rise but cash grain producers could see lower fuel and interest costs, the report said.

Farm Hands: Mendonca steps down from Newsom's administration

Governor **Gavin Newsom’s** chief economic and business adviser, **Lenny Mendonca**, stepped down from his post last Friday to focus on his family and personal businesses. Mendonca also served as director of the state’s office of business and economic development. Mendonca was appointed to the position in January 2019.

The National Mango Board elected new officers to its board of directors. The officers are as follows: **Jojo Shiba** of San Diego, chairwoman; **Clark Golden**, Vineland, N.J., vice chairman; **Rodrigo Diaz**, Culiacan, Mexico, secretary; and **Marsela McGrane**, Los Angeles, treasurer.

Starr Ranch Grower located in Wenatchee, Wash., has added three people to its sales and marketing staff: **Jason Fonfara**, **Randy Eckert**, and **Morgan Maitoza**. Fonfara works in the export and domestic sales and marketing department. He most recently worked at FirstFruits Marketing in the sales and marketing department. Eckert joined the company’s Yakima sales and marketing department. He most recently worked at Yakima Fresh, a company he has been with for the past 15 years. Morgan Maitoza is now the social media and communications manager, working remotely from Monterey, Calif. This is a newly created position at Starr Ranch Growers. Maitoza most recently was a marketing manager at California Giant Berry Farms and a marketing intern at Naturipe Farms.

Anne Alonzo will join Corteva Agriscience as the company’s senior vice president for external affairs and chief sustainability officer, effective April 20. She will be based in Washington, D.C. She succeeds **Dana Bolden**, chief communications officer, who has been leading the team on an interim basis since February 2019 when **Krysta Harden** left the post. Most recently, Alonzo served as president and CEO of the American Egg Board. To read more on Alonzo, click [here](#).



Anne Alonzo

President **Donald Trump** announced many of the executives, economists and industry leaders who will form his Great American Economic Revival Industry Groups, designed to help the White House chart the path forward after the COVID-19 pandemic subsides. Appointees include American Farm Bureau Federation President **Zippy Duvall**, Cargill CEO **David MacLennan**, Corteva CEO **Jim Collins**, Grimmway Farms Co-owner **Barbara Grimm**, National Restaurant Association Interim CEO **Marvin Irby**, Deere & Company CEO **John May**, and Walmart CEO **Doug McMillon**, among others. For the full list, [click here](#).

Secretary of the Interior **David Bernhardt** announced on [Twitter](#) Monday that Assistant Interior Secretary **Susan Combs** is leaving the department April 25 to head back to her home state of Texas. Combs was confirmed by the Senate in June 2019 after waiting two years for her confirmation. Before joining Interior, Combs served as a Texas state lawmaker and the Texas agriculture commissioner.

Sprouts Farmers Market Inc. has added **Gilliam Phipps** as the new senior vice president and chief marketing officer. Phipps will oversee Sprouts' marketing, advertising, customer engagement and private label teams. He most recently worked at The Kroger Co. as the vice president of branding, marketing and "Our Brands".

Hronis has hired **Anthony Johnson** as a domestic sales associate. Johnson grew up in California's Central Valley and is a graduate of California State University-Fresno.

The American Egg Board selected **Liz Gruszkiewicz** to lead AEB's Consumer Marketing group as the new vice president of consumer marketing, effective April 20. Gruszkiewicz has over 20 years of experience in the advertising industry. Gruszkiewicz joins AEB from Energy BBDO, where she works at the senior vice president and client service director. She has also led the AEB account for the past three years.

The Biotechnology Innovation Organization (BIO) has hired **Matt Herman** to its industrial and environmental team as director of policy. Herman's first day was Monday. He previously worked for the Renewable Energy Group as the manager of sustainability. **Eric Lutt** has been moved from the industrial and environmental team to serve as the senior director of federal government relations, leading BIO's advocacy efforts on food, agriculture, energy, and environmental policy. Lutt has been with BIO for the past seven years. **Connor McKoy** has been promoted to director of communications for agriculture and environment issues. He first joined BIO in January 2018, having previously working for Reingold Inc.

Lucy Murfitt has been promoted to chief counsel for Sen. **Lisa Murkowski**, R-Alaska, on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. **Isaac Edwards** has been promoted to deputy chief counsel on the committee.

Lucy Koch has been promoted to a professional staff member on the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee under Sen. **Maria Cantwell**, D-Wash. Koch previously served as a research assistant on the committee.



Matt Herman

Far West Agribusiness Association (FWAA) has tapped **Margaret Jensen** as its new executive director, effective April 15. She succeeds **Jim Fitzgerald**, who retired Dec. 31 but stayed on as a consultant through April 2020. Jensen previously worked as an agriculture recruiter for Ag 1 Source.

Former Farm Bureau leader **Joan Lopes** passed away at the age of 72. Lopes and her late husband, Jim, each served on the Alameda County Farm Bureau board of directors. The couple grew walnuts in the Vernalis area and were very active on California water issues. The couple was presented with the California Farm Bureau Federation Distinguished Service Award in 2017.

Best regards,

Sara Wyant
Editor

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