

Pivoting to food banks raises new hurdles for farmers and the hungry

Farmers are thankful for USDA and California purchasing their products for food banks. Yet, switching highly specialized supply chains to an oversubscribed market is raising new challenges as well as questions about how the nation feeds the hungry during crises. Economists are also arguing the strategy is no substitute for putting money in the hands of consumers.



For the dairy industry, the sudden closing of restaurants, schools and large venues without a smooth transition to food banks or groceries led to milk dumping in early April.

“With the processors, who react to market signals with supply and demand, there was such an enigma around where the demand was and where the supply needed to go,” said **Anja Raudabaugh**, CEO of Western United Dairies, during a forum on Friday hosted by *CalMatters*.

Raudabaugh explained that processing was the biggest challenge for pivoting to donations. She credited processors with making rapid changes to adjust portions for family-sized consumption, easing the supply. This also meant milk that was bottled into small cartons for schools was now filling four-gallon jugs destined for food banks and groceries, a process only a limited number of facilities could handle.

“You’re talking about shifting the weight of hundreds of dairy farms onto maybe one processor,” she said.

To build a steady stream of donations, Western United partnered with a different type of bank: Wells Fargo. It helped to deliver aged cheese products to food banks in Northern California.

Raudabaugh said this could serve as a model for the public-private partnerships supporting the Farm to Family Program by the California Association of Food Banks.

Gov. Gavin Newsom announced last week a new effort to ramp up partnerships and philanthropic donations for the program, with more than \$3 million in seed money from USDA funds, along with support from billionaire Kat Taylor and CoBank. Newsom hopes to raise \$15 million in total, through Taylor's engagement efforts. The goal is to deliver 21 million pounds of food each month to food banks statewide.



Western United Dairies CEO Anja Raudabaugh

Steve Linkhart, who runs the association's Farm to Family program, said the National Guard has also been helping to meet the unprecedented demand. It has filled in for "all these things that the local food banks really couldn't go out and hire for," such as food pickups from farms.

Newsom also allocated \$20 million last month in emergency support from the state's General Fund to go to food banks.

"That was the first time the state has ever made a General Fund allocation for food banks. But we knew that unemployment was going to cause this huge 70% increase in demand," said CDFA Secretary Karen Ross during a town hall event by the California Food and Farming Network on Friday. "We thought it would help us go for several months. It has provided food boxes for 900,000 families, and it's already been used up."

Ross also noted that food service industries had previously accounted for half the nation's total food spending, signaling just how much food waste and revenue could potentially be lost during the lockdown without transitioning to new markets. With fresh produce, the Western Growers Association has estimated the loss at \$1 billion.

During the event, State Senator Anna Caballero, D-Salinas, pointed out that before the pandemic, one in eight Californians and one in five children were already facing hunger, with cities in agriculturally rich regions hit hardest, including Bakersfield and Fresno.

Ross called for a better federal approach toward addressing the unique needs of local communities.

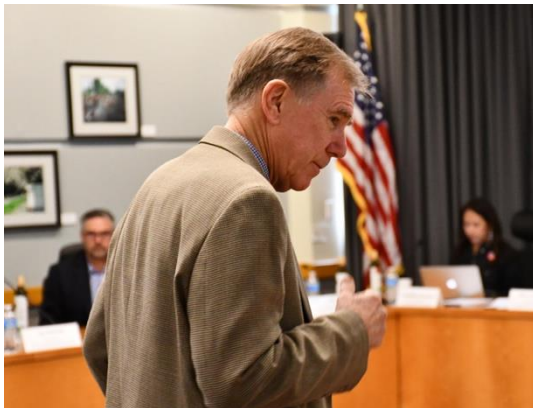
USDA has put \$3 billion in emergency spending under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) toward purchasing fresh produce, dairy and meat. The agency plans to distribute those purchases through its Families to Farmers Food Box program. On Monday, USDA announced an additional \$470 million in commodity purchases, including \$120 million for dairy.

"My advocacy – if I have an advocacy right now – is that in the next package of relief from the federal government, we ask for state block grants to support our food banks," said Ross. "Right now, they need money."

Jaclyn Pack, who works in food acquisitions for the Central California Food Bank in Fresno, said money has been just one obstacle among many. She said trying to understand all the information coming out of the national program was “like trying to drink water out of Niagara Falls.”

“You're just constantly trying to figure out how to help your growers and those who are applying for this program to give them the best information they can,” she said.

Meanwhile, web traffic on the food bank’s food finder app shot up 500% as more victims of the economic fallout sought help. The sudden demand for shelf-stable items led to some canned products previously delivered in days now taking more than six weeks to arrive. Truck loads were coming in with just half the order, while other trucks, as well as cold storage, were hitting peak capacity.



UC Davis Professor Daniel Sumner

In the dairy industry, California’s regulatory burdens have led to other impacts, raising questions about how the nation responds to food security in the long-term for this crisis as well as the next one.

“The consolidation of our food system does not lend itself to humanitarian need,” said Raudabaugh. “The economics become so much to overcome you cannot address your local humanitarian crisis on a community-by-community basis with any speed.”

Raudabaugh hopes to find ways processors can start treating food banks as regular customers, making the transition more seamless the next time.

For now, the industry will be struggling over the next eight weeks as it sees “what will certainly be some of the lowest market prices ever in the history of dairy.”

At a town hall last week with legislators and the California Farm Bureau Federation, Dan Kowalski, an economist and vice president of CoBank's Knowledge Exchange Division, said dairy demand nationwide is down about 10%.

“Some butter and cheese prices are down at or near 20-year lows,” he said. “California is a major exporter of milk powder and those prices have fallen about 26% since January.”

Raudabaugh said the federal and state funding are “not going to cover anything close” to that kind of loss.

“There is not enough money in the world right now to fix this crippling loss of our markets,” said Raudabaugh. “Putting that power back into the consumer is really where you'll start to see recovery.”

UC Davis Professor and agricultural economist Daniel Sumner has agreed with that idea. Sumner, who took part in the same meeting as Kowalski, said a better way to help both the industry and those in need is through food stamps.

“We know this recession – that’s coming and is already here – is going to have substantial effects over the next several months,” he said. “We still have the income loss, and it’s really important going forward to do what we can to get the funds to buy food in the hands of vulnerable people.”

N95 masks for pesticide applications are still hard to find

As the state pumps nearly \$1 billion into procuring N95 masks for healthcare workers, other industries deemed essential are left competing for purchases and getting by on cloth masks when possible. That is not likely to change anytime soon.



On Monday, Gov. Gavin Newsom said the state has now distributed more than 45 million N95 surgical masks. Through an undisclosed contract, the administration has procured another shipment of 10 million masks over the last week.

“The good news is we’re broadening the availability of these masks to more and more people, more and more sectors of our economy,” he said at his daily press briefing.

CDFA Secretary Karen Ross had a similar message for the State Board of Food and Agriculture at its monthly meeting on Tuesday.

“We’ll be able to supplement some, but not all, needs,” she said. “It will still be up to employers to source whatever they can.”

Ross explained how inter-agency teams are working on an adjudication process to fill gaps for essential workers that are “non-healthcare and non-first responders.” Yet these will not be medical-grade N95 masks. She acknowledged N95 masks are necessary for pesticide applications and certain functions in grain mills.

“We still do not have enough for all of our health practitioners to the level we know we’re going to need over the rest of this year,” she said.

Once the state establishes how many non-medical masks it has, it will distribute those through county offices, with ag commissioners being the key point of contact.

CDFA has made a list of potential suppliers of N95 masks, but the results have been inconsistent, said Ross. The Department of Pesticide Regulation has made recommendations on alternatives to N95s, but those products can be just as scarce, considerably more expensive or not helpful, since one suggestion is to just choose a different product.

An informal agriculture subcommittee within Newsom’s Task Force on Business and Jobs Recovery has been laying a case to the administration on the need for N95 masks as well as sanitation materials. The group recently surveyed 1,500 companies across 45 counties to assess their needs for a report to Newsom.

“We’ve also taken that to our California congressional delegation,” said Almond Alliance President Elaine Trevino, who recently joined the task force. “We’re trying to maximize this effort not just at the state level, but also on the on the federal level as well.”



Grower Shipper Association of Central California
President Chris Valadez

Trevino added that the group has asked the state to coordinate guidance on worker safety between its federal and local partners, rather than regulatory enforcement when PPE is in such short supply.

As more manufacturers come online and supply chains are streamlined, ag organizations are having more success with procuring masks.

Chris Valadez, president of the Grower Shipper Association of Central California, said he has placed an order for one million masks and so far has received about 100,000. He did not specify

if any of those are medical grade.

Growers are finding other shortcomings with cloth masks as well. Farmer Garrett Patricio of Westside Produce, who also sits on the task force, said he has bought about 1,500 cotton masks for his employees. But many of them are too heavy to fit right or are not comfortable as temperatures have been rising to 100 degrees.

A [survey](#) by the California Farm Bureau Federation released Tuesday found that about 30% of the farmers were “unable to undertake routine planting, cultivation or crop-care activities due to lack of PPE, such as respiratory protection.”

USDA’s ambitious 'truck-to-trunk' Food Box plan aims to redirect US farm surplus to needy families

Stung by scenes of farmers dumping milk and plowing under crops, the Trump administration is launching a never-before-tried plan to use the nation’s commercial food distributors to buy fresh produce, dairy products and meat and give them away to needy families across the country.

The Agriculture Department is scheduled to award the first contracts for the “Farm to Families Food Box” program on Friday, just two weeks after it released the rules for the plan that was hastily cobbled together under a \$19 billion coronavirus relief program that Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue announced April 17.

More than 600 companies and organizations have put in bids for the program, according to the United Fresh Produce Association.

“The department is under increased pressure to make something happen quickly because everyone is seeing these lines of people waiting at food banks to get food, and the department is genuinely wanting to respond to that,” said Michael Dykes, president and CEO of the International Dairy Foods Association.

Some say USDA should have acted sooner to divert surplus commodities.

Former Sen. Heidi Heitkamp, who leads a group, the One Country Project, that is assisting rural Democratic candidates, accuses USDA in a [new video](#) of dragging its feet on dealing with the food system disruptions. “USDA has been late to appreciate the challenges of the supply chain. When we have people who need food, but we’re dumping milk, there’s a failure of leadership,” she says.

Critics also point out that the Food Box plan has hallmarks of Perdue's widely panned proposal to partially convert the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program into "Harvest Boxes" of fixed commodities.



Ag Secretary Sonny Perdue (left) and IDFA President and Michael Dykes (right)

There are big questions about the plan, and groups watching it say the answers won't be clear until the bids are approved and the program begins to operate: How much of the money will go to food versus shipping and handling costs? To what extent will some regions and rural areas be left out? What happens as food distributors start to see their restaurant and other business return? In Texas, for example, where restaurants have reopened with restrictions, some distributors already have indicated to food banks that they are reluctant to get involved in the Food Box program.

The program's goal is to spend at least \$100 million each over the next six months on the three product categories: dairy products and fluid milk; fresh fruits and vegetables; and pork and chicken, commodities that were among those hurt the worst by the sudden closure of restaurants, schools, universities and other food service outlets. All of the food must be 100% U.S. produced and processed.

To get around the shortage of volunteers and refrigeration space facing food banks, the food is supposed to be packed in household-size boxes and trucked directly to sites, including schools and nonprofits, where it can be picked up by people who need it. The first deliveries are expected to begin in less than two weeks. Food banks were still working on distribution plans this week.

The goal is get the “box off the truck and in the trunk, if at all possible,” David Tuckwiller, a deputy administrator with USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service, said on a webinar describing how the plan would work.

Tuckwiller freely acknowledged the challenge the program poses for AMS, the branch of USDA that is having to depart from its well-established process for buying millions of dollars of single commodities by the truckloads for schools and food banks.

“We do know how to buy food. That’s what we do on a regular basis,” he said. “However, we don’t know how to buy food this way.”

Dykes praises USDA for thinking creatively about how to help producers who have been hit hardest by the COVID-19 crisis and said it will benefit farmers and processors as well as the needy.

“The situation just lends itself to this, and I think it will be a win for all of us, and we’ll do the right thing by feeding a growing number of people who are losing their jobs and are more dependent on the food banks and nonprofits to get groceries,” he said.

Dykes said USDA officials have shown a willingness to consider adjustments. One thing some dairy processors have asked for is flexibility to vary the mix of products in boxes depending on the dietary needs of different groups of recipients.

Carrie Calvert, managing director of government relations for Feeding America, which represents food banks, says it’s an entirely new experience for AMS to work with the food-service distribution system. “That’s the big unknown,” she said.

There is “a lot of interest in how the food supply chain can reconfigure itself on the fly. ... I’m not sure any of us have the right answer.”

Many food banks have been swamped with demand. According to an April 13-15 survey, 95% of food banks in the Feeding America network reported an increase in demand for food assistance compared to last year, with an average increase of 70%.

The food service distributors seeking to participate in the program including Rosemont, Ill.-based US Foods. Spokeswoman Sara Matheu said US Foods would be tapping existing suppliers to provide the products, including meat, that USDA is seeking.

She also said the company "has an extensive network of distribution centers and transportation assets that are leveraged to serve both urban and rural communities.”



Carrie Calvert, Feeding America

But some critics say the Food Box program is a cost-inefficient way of addressing food insecurity.

Scott Winship, executive director of the Congressional Joint Economic Committee, said it would be better to either give the needy cash that they can use for food or to provide benefits through the existing Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

“Picking out a select set of foods that you’re going to deliver to them without their having a say over or with any regard to whether that’s going to be the best thing for them is definitely the third best of

those three options,” Winship said.

Advocates for small farms fear the program will be dominated by large producers and distributors. **Bidders were required to specify to AMS how they would engage small-scale farmers, but the program’s food safety requirements will effectively exclude those**

producers, said Wes King, senior policy specialist for the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition.

Distributors must ensure their suppliers have either passed an USDA Good Agricultural Practices/Good Handling Practices audit conducted by AMS or a Global Food Safety Initiative benchmarked certification program audit, said King.

“Considering the unprecedented nature of the global crisis we are in, USDA could have very easily not required GAP audits and certification,” King said.

The program also is coming too late to help some of the farmers hit hardest by the pandemic; Florida vegetable growers were harvesting crops in March as their business with restaurants, hotels, cruise ships and other buyers disappeared virtually overnight.

Florida growers lost \$523 million because of the pandemic, according to the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. The losses include \$40 million to \$50 million to green bean producers, who saw their prices fall from \$16 to \$18 a box to as little as \$6 a box in one week, the department says. Cucumber growers lost as much as \$38 million.

“While we appreciate the effort of USDA ... in setting these programs up, they really aren’t going to benefit Florida specialty crops in any meaningful way,” said Lisa Lochridge, a spokeswoman for the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association.

Her group has instead put its focus on maximizing the direct payments that USDA is planning to make under a separate program. A proposed payment cap of \$125,000 per commodity per farmer or \$250,000 for all crops would fall far short of compensating growers for their pandemic-related losses, she said. The group is trying to persuade USDA to increase or eliminate the limits.

Business liability shaping up as key issue for next COVID relief bill

The timing and substance of the next COVID-19 relief bill may hinge on the issue of liability.

Republicans including Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy are insisting on a “shield” to protect businesses from civil lawsuits, but Democrats are pushing back.



Jason Resnick, Western Growers

McConnell says House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is “ignoring” what he calls the “second pandemic — an avalanche of lawsuits that is waiting to greet” businesses as they reopen. But Pelosi said last week she and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer “would not be inclined to be supporting any immunity from liability.”

A wide range of business groups, including many in the food industry, say they need the protections in order to operate without fear of future lawsuits. In an April 14 [letter](#) to McConnell, dozens of groups, including the North American Meat Institute, American Bakers Association, FMI, The Food Industry Association, the National Cotton Council and United

Fresh Produce Association, pointed to the existence of state and federal “good Samaritan” laws to protect businesses from lawsuits.

“These protections cover individuals as well as corporations, such as airlines and vaccine manufacturers that help protect passengers or customers in need,” the groups said. “During the COVID-19 crisis, businesses that make up the nation’s essential critical infrastructure are acting as good Samaritans. They are serving the real, immediate needs of the American people and they should not have to worry they will be sued for simply providing the products and services Americans need right now.”

“We really want to prevent the wave of coronavirus exposure litigation from crashing onto the family farmers,” says Jason Resnick, vice president and general counsel of Western Growers, which represents produce growers in Arizona, California, Colorado and New Mexico. His group signed on to a [letter](#) to California Gov. Gavin Newsom asking him “to expand the Emergency Services Act, which protects private entities from civil liability during times of crisis, to include all industry sectors that are providing ‘critical goods, services and facilities’ during the pandemic.”

Resnick tells *Agri-Pulse* that Western Growers’ members “are doing everything they can to keep their employees safe,” including use of social distancing and better sanitation, but “that doesn’t stop the plaintiffs’ attorneys who are circling, waiting for employees or others to get sick from this worldwide pandemic and blame it on an employers.”

Asked whether growers have been slow to adopt protections for workers, Resnick says it’s been just the opposite — they have “very rapidly embraced” evolving federal guidelines as they have been issued.

Offering a different perspective, however, are worker advocates such as Alexis Guild at Farmworker Justice, who said on a press call last week, “We are hearing from workers that many employers are not following” CDC guidelines.

Farmworkers “tend to lack adequate access to hand-washing stations in the field,” she says. “They are not necessarily provided protective equipment and often live in crowded and substandard housing.”

Her group supports an Essential Workers Bill of Rights for inclusion in the next COVID-19 relief bill, whose timing is uncertain, in part because of the liability disagreement.

“You can’t have liability protection for business without assuring that workers are treated safely and that the conditions are safe,” Rep. Ro Khanna, D-Calif., told reporters last week. “My argument would be to McConnell if you want safe harbors for business to reopen and not have the threat of extreme liability, then you have to adopt the workers’ bill of rights.”

Proposed by Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., and Khanna, the worker’s bill of rights says “CEOs should be required to personally certify they are in compliance with worker protections, so they can face civil and criminal penalties if they break their word,” according to a [summary](#) of the proposal.

The liability issue gathered steam with comments made by President Donald Trump before he signed an Executive Order designed to keep meat and poultry plants operating. Trump said the E.O. would “solve any liability problems” those companies are facing.

Issued using the authority of the Defense Production Act, the E.O. “clarifies which safety standards companies must follow — those found in the joint guidance from the CDC and OSHA,” says a USDA spokesperson. “There will be no longer conflicting guidance coming from state and local officials. By clarifying the standard they must meet, companies subject to the order may take the actions called for in the joint CDC/OSHA guidance and thereby reduce their risk of being found legally liable.”

The guidance from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggests a number of actions meat and poultry plants can take to reduce the chances workers will contract or spread COVID-19, including modifying production processes, increasing sanitation efforts and placing plexiglass barriers between workers on the lines.

A subsequent enforcement memo from Department of Labor Solicitor Kate O’Scannlain and Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for OSHA Loren Sweatt says “because of the President’s invocation of the DPA, no part of the Joint Meat Processing Guidance should be construed to indicate that state and local authorities may direct a meat and poultry processing facility to close, to remain closed, or to operate in accordance with procedures other than those provided for in this guidance.”

OSHA said it would consider supporting businesses in court if they demonstrate “good faith attempts” to comply with the guidance but are sued for workplace exposures.

“Likewise, the Department of Labor will consider similar requests by workers if their employer has not taken steps in good faith” to follow the guidance, the memo says.



Rep. Ro Khanna, D-Calif.

In a report issued Friday, May 1, the Congressional Research Service said the Defense Production Act includes language limiting liability for companies complying with the DPA. But is not a “blanket grant of immunity from liability for all actions that an entity may take under a DPA order.”

“While an entity may raise a DPA order as a defense if sued for actions taken while complying with that order, whether that entity will ultimately be granted immunity by a court is a fact-specific inquiry,” CRS said.

Lisa Mankofsky, litigation director at the Center for Science on the Public Interest, says a liability shield would simply incentivize “bad behavior” and would be “counterproductive to businesses staying open.”

In a letter to congressional leaders, CSPI said “state tort law already provides companies with sufficient legal protection and takes into account the context in which any potentially tortious act occurs.” Generally speaking, “to bring a successful tort lawsuit, employees or customers would need to prove that a company’s negligent conduct caused them to contract COVID-19.”

Mankofsky said the “smart thing to do” for businesses would be to comply with the federal guidance.

Western Growers’ Resnick said a liability shield “should not incentivize bad behavior,” which he said “should never be condoned.” However, “that’s not the intent of the shield.” If employers are following federal guidance, “they should not also be subject to civil litigation.”

Resnick says “there’s a lot of dispute about what negligence means in this environment.” Businesses that have engaged in grossly negligent conduct “should be held accountable,” but “once you start getting below that line, the question of where the negligence line is drawn becomes much more murky.”

Alex Tomaszczuk, an attorney at the Pillsbury law firm who specializes in government contracting, said he believes the DPA “pre-empts state and local law if it is inconsistent with the federal statute.” However, he added, “as a practical matter, it is in the interest of the federal government to cooperate with local and state authorities.”

Jonathan Pomerance, an attorney who focuses on government contract matters at PilieroMazza in Washington, D.C., said “The Defense Production Act does not provide the president or USDA with the authority to preempt state and local workplace health and safety laws. All the DPA does is allow the government to direct plants to prioritize the production of certain items, and allocate the distribution of those items.”

Got protein? Shortages emerge in groceries and retail outlets

Consumer demand for fresh meat, pork and poultry sales is soaring, but as processing remains slowed or shuttered in many places across the U.S., you can expect shortages in some retail outlets as well as many grocery chains.

Meat department dollar sales for the year-to-date through April 26 were up 21.7% from 2019, boosted by double-digit growth for seven weeks running, says Anne-Marie Roerink, president of 210 Analytics LLC. Volume sales for the same period were up 15.9% as volume has been trailing dollars throughout the pandemic.

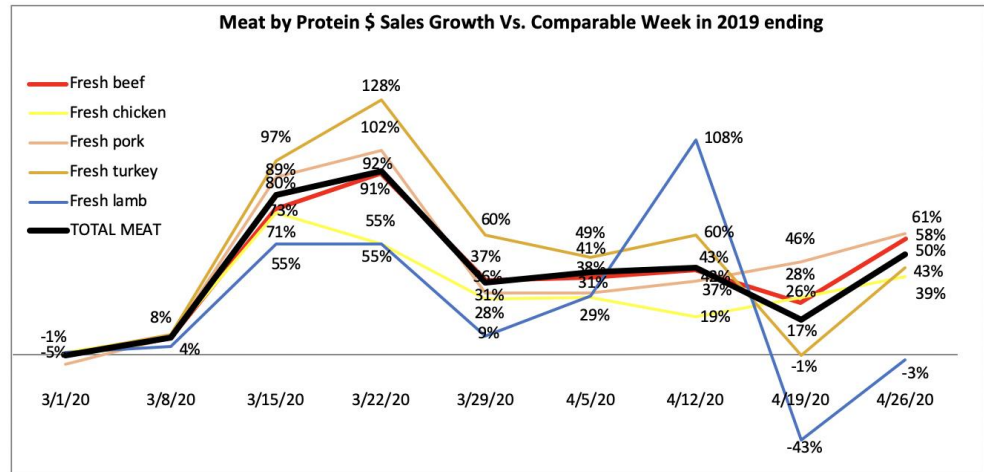
“Additionally, the gap between volume and dollar sales is widening — signaling significant upward pressure on pricing due to tightness in the supply chain,” notes Roerink.

“Based on the current market changes as well as announced plant closures, sourcing has been challenging, to say the least,” noted Samer Rahman, senior director of meat and seafood for Allegiance Retail Services. “With the news reports on plant closures, customers are under the impression meat will not be available in any form. They were alarmed by these reports and started loading up on fresh and frozen meats.”

An additional obstacle in sourcing meat is the reopening of restaurant businesses in multiple states, resulting in foodservice companies coming into the market to purchase their needs. “This dynamic has affected the USDA markets to levels I have never seen before,” Rahman added. “I have had to explore additional options, from Australian meats to frozen chicken and burgers to have as an alternate offering to the customers the next few weeks.”

Christine McCracken, executive director of food and agribusiness for Rabobank, says meat processing plants are beginning to reopen, but “labor has been slow to return and volumes remain sharply below year-ago levels.”

“Beef and pork production are both down 35% year-over-year. A handful of chicken and turkey plants closed in the past week, but the impact on total production has been limited. Processors are allocating limited supplies to their bigger customers, leaving smaller, more regional operators with fewer options.”



Source: IRI, Total US, MULO, 1 week % change vs. YA

“Consumers will begin to see noticeable shortages of pork, beef and chicken at retail the first full week of May, as prolonged plant closures and labor-related disruption have cleared fresh meat inventories,” adds McCracken.

McCracken agreed that the recent media attention on meat shortages drove another round of panic buying starting the last week of April and going into May.

“We are already seeing stronger foodservice demand for meat as quarantine measures are lifted and restaurants reopen. The combination of tight supplies and renewed foodservice interest drove beef prices to record highs, up 35% week-over-week,” said McCracken. “The sharp drop in pork volumes and good demand also boosted pork prices, up 23% week-over-week, led by stronger loin values and a recovery in bellies.”

Some major retailers, like Sam’s Club, Costco and Kroger, are already limiting the number of meat purchases consumers can make. Wendy’s, a major fast food chain with more than 8,000 locations, is pulling beef from the menu at some of its locations.

Ground proteins continue to be popular due to their versatility and ease of preparation, according to Roerink and IRI data. Over the week ending April 26 versus the comparable week in 2019:

- Ground beef sales increased 55.8%
- Ground turkey increased 46.9%
- Ground chicken increased 61.2%
- Ground pork increased 50.7%

Lamb sales were affected by Orthodox Easter (April 19 this year versus April 28 last year). The main protein eaten for Orthodox Easter is lamb and this is why the week ending April 26 showed negative growth.

But with limited affordable options, consumers are exploring some unfamiliar cuts and then searching on the internet for recipes and directions on how to prepare them. For example, Canada Beef reported a 77% increase in users over March and an even higher 107% increase for April. A consistent top search item was “how to cook a roast” followed by the recipe section.

Looking ahead, Roerink says, “the reopening of restaurants in these states may provide an indicator of consumers’ mental readiness and economic ability to re-engage with foodservice.

“The widely covered meat shortages in consumer media caused a renewed run on meat the first week of May, which likely means highly elevated numbers in next week’s results as well. For the foreseeable future, it is likely that grocery retailing will continue to capture an above-average share of the food dollar,” she adds.

News Briefs

USDA loosens organic acreage requirements due to coronavirus. Crop producers will have more time to verify their organic acreage for crop insurance under a loosened regulatory regime rolled out earlier this week by USDA’s Risk Management Agency. RMA-approved crop insurers may allow producers to report acreage as certified organic, or transition to organic, for the 2020 crop year “if they can show they have requested a written certification from a certifying agent by their policy’s acreage reporting date.” In a [release](#), RMA cited “stay-at-home” orders that may be preventing “in-person crop insurance transactions” as its rationale for the decision. “As the pandemic continues, RMA is also continuing to add more flexibilities to assist America’s farmers and ranchers,” RMA Administrator Martin Barbre said. “We will ensure that the federal crop insurance program continues to serve the needs of our nation’s producers.” According to RMA, policyholders who have “requested but not received an organic certificate, organic plan, or other written documentation” will need to notify their insurance agent within 30 days once a certifying agent informs them of their organic plan or certificate status. RMA also took a [handful of other actions](#) to respond to increased social distancing in the wake of the pandemic, including allowing for increased electronic report submissions, allowing for some self-certification for replant inspections, and waiving the witness signature requirement for approval of an Assignment of Indemnity.

USDA helps American Indian students with 'New Beginning'. Tribal students will have many new resources available to attend land-grant colleges and universities as a result of the “New Beginning for Tribal Students program,” created in the 2018 farm bill and unveiled recently by the Department of Agriculture. Grant applications for the program are now available from USDA and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture. The program authorizes USDA to match state funding for programs at land-grant colleges or universities that support American Indian students. The authorization is capped at \$5 million per year and up to \$500,000 per state. Grant applications are due June 12. “The intention of the [New Beginning for Tribal Students](#) program is to increase the number of students recruited, retained and graduating from land-grant institutions by providing a culturally significant educational experience that they can use throughout their life,” noted NIFA Director Scott Angle. Colleges and universities that receive the grant will use funds to support American Indian students for articulation agreements with tribal colleges; dual credit programs; recruiting; tuition and related fees; experiential learning; student services, including tutoring; counseling; academic advising; and other student services that would increase the retention and graduation rates. [For more information, click here.](#)

Farm Hands West: Steve Roodzant tapped as new CEO of Index Fresh

Index Fresh has tapped **Steve Roodzant** to serve as the new CEO. He most recently served as senior vice president of plant operations at Grimmway Farms. Roodzant joined Grimmway Farms in 2007 as general manager and was promoted to the senior vice president position in 2016. He succeeds **Dana Thomas**.

Kori Tuggle has joined Braga Fresh as the new vice president of marketing and product development. Tuggle brings more than 20 years of experience in produce marketing. She has worked in marketing roles for Safeway and Ocean Mist Farms and most recently she was the vice president of marketing and product development at Church Bros./True Leaf Farms.

Cora Heacox now works for Germaines Seed Technology, located in Gilroy, Calif., as the new senior sales coordinator for the North America horticultural commercial team. She brings 35 years of experience in the seed industry. She most recently worked as the customer service manager at Seed Dynamics Inc.

J.B. Penn has retired after working over five decades in the agriculture industry, the last 14 years at John Deere. He joined the company in 2006 as its chief economist. Before that, Penn served as a USDA undersecretary for farm and foreign agricultural services. Earlier, he worked in various roles at USDA and also as senior staff economist for the President's Council of Economic Advisers. Penn served as President of Economic Perspectives, Inc., from 1981-1988 and Senior Vice President of Sparks Commodities, Inc., from 1988—2001. In retirement, J.B. plans to make his home base on the family livestock farm where he grew up in the Ozark foothills of northeastern Arkansas and spend time with his daughter in Cummin, Georgia.



Brian Quintenz has decided to not to seek renomination as a commissioner of the Commodity Futures Trading Commission. Quintenz's five-year statutory term as commissioner expires this month, and he says he wishes to pursue "new challenges and opportunities." Before being appointed to the commission, Quintenz worked for Merrill Lynch and also on Capitol Hill.



Brian Quintenz

Wayne Maloney has retired from USDA, where he served as the deputy director in the office of external affairs at Rural Development. Maloney has worked for USDA since 2002, and before that he worked on Capitol Hill for Sen. **Ted Stevens**, R-Alaska. Maloney said he hopes to do some private sector work, but for this summer he is focused on growing the best garden and cutting lots of firewood.

Scott Hutchins' nomination to be undersecretary of agriculture for research, education, and economics has been sent to the Senate for confirmation.

J. Scott Angle has accepted the position of vice president of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at the University of Florida, effective July 13. Angle currently serves as director of USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture and has more than 35 years' experience in agricultural science and administration. Before joining NIFA, he served 25 years as the director

of the Maryland Agricultural Experiment Station and Maryland Cooperative Extension. He will succeed **Jack Payne**, who will retire July 1 after serving nearly 10 years in that position.

Molly O'Connor has left OFW Law, where she worked as a senior policy adviser. In her seven years at the firm, she covered a variety of agricultural issues including biotechnology, forestry, pet food, livestock, meat processing/packaging, international trade, and international food aid policy issues. She is heading to CropLife America as the new director of federal government relations.

Kincannon & Reed welcomed **Jimmy Paulakuhn** to its team as the new managing director. He will focus on talent acquisition needs of its animal agriculture clients. Paulakuhn previously served as the director of commercial poultry operations at Pfizer and spent two years as Zoetis's national sales director for U.S. poultry.

Jamieson Greer has left the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, where he served as the chief of staff to **Robert Lighthizer**. He has taken a new job with King & Spalding where he will be a partner and plans to register as a lobbyist.

Lillie Brady has left her position at USDA as director of intergovernmental and external affairs. She accepted a new position with Corteva AgriScience's government affairs team as a governmental affairs associate.

Elsa Murano has been selected to serve on the newly formed Food Security of the Americas Advisory Council to help address food supply issues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Earlier in her career, Murano served as the undersecretary for food safety at USDA. She is a member of the board of directors for Hormel Foods, and also served as Texas A&M University's first female and first Hispanic-American president. She is currently the director of the Norman Borlaug Institute for International Agriculture at Texas A&M University.

On May 4, United Natural Foods Inc. named **Jim Gehr** as its new chief supply chain officer. **Paul Green**, UNFI's current chief supply chain officer, has taken on the new role of president of UNFI Fresh. Gehr has spent the past 29 years at DHL Supply Chain where, since 2004, he has served as president of retail for North America.

Best regards,

Sara Wyant
Editor

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