



Working together to create a more local, healthy and sustainable food system

fieldtofamily.org

Dear Field to Family Advisors, Partners and Supporters:

For the last three weeks, I have been working with our staff and our board of directors to find ways to provide increased local food access and to continue to support local farmers during the COVID-19 crisis. We are all facing a new reality-- including our Food Hub customers, our regional farmers and local food advocates -- and we all recognize that we need to continue to find creative new ways to meet our mission to support a stronger community-based food system. I assure you that all of us at Field to Family are committed to contributing to overcoming the challenges our state and beyond are facing during this pandemic in every way possible.

To do our part to help reduce the spread and flatten the curve of the COVID-19 virus, I have directed staff to work from home whenever possible until further notice. We use a virtual meeting platform so that we can continue coordinating our program work, maintain operations and connect with each other, farmers, chefs, board members and partners.

Last month, we issued a statement to our [Food Hub](#) partners, in response to the COVID-19 crisis that ensures our partner institutions that Field to Family not only complies with- but goes above and beyond all- national, state and local governmental rules and regulations for food safety. In addition, we have signed agreements from all hub growers that assures us that they are in compliance with all local, state and federal regulations. For our own operations, we have increased our already frequent cleaning schedule at our warehouse including our food storage areas and our delivery vehicles. Staff members are required to wash their hands at the start of their shift and before handling produce boxes. Delivery drivers sanitize hands after every customer delivery and fuel fill ups and, when needed, are leaving produce at designated areas on-site, contacting staff to pick-up from the door.

As with the entire state/ nation institutional Food Hub Sales are down. Schools have sent students home, nursing homes are limiting visitors; restaurants and hotels have drastically reduced sales and some institutions are limiting their vendors to reduce or limit exposure. However, from what we have heard from our hub partners providing direct to consumer sales, they are seeing huge spikes. Whether that continues is yet to be seen, but it does have us motivated to enhance our local food promotional programs.

As part of our regular work plan and in response to the ever-changing landscape, we are doing the following in an effort to increase access to local foods and build a stronger community food system:

Local Food Promotion

We have continued to promote local farmers and local food through our programs in the following ways:

- For the second year in a row, we sponsored a section in the annual “Bread and Butter” magazine published by Little Village listing all farmers offering weekly food boxes (otherwise known as CSAs) to residents in the Iowa City/ Cedar Rapids region. The magazine has been printed and will be distributed once it is deemed safe. Until then, our section can be viewed [online here](#).
- As part of our [Certified Local program](#), we have published a searchable online listing of local food and farmers that is linked from our website. It is simple- put a crop name and/or part of a farm name and/or a location in the search field and hit submit. If any of the words are included in their listing, those farms will pop up in the results. Or if you are looking for CSA farmers, simply check the CSA box and click submit. We are seeing a huge increase in traffic to this page. Farmers can easily add their own listing or request changes from the site.
- At this point, we are still planning to update our printed Local Food and Farm Guide this year. However, due to COVID-19 we may need to delay its publication until later this year, find a new way to update last year’s edition or wait until 2021 to provide a new Local Food and Farm Guide.

Contact-Free Farmers Market Food Boxes

With the news that farmers market’s might be delayed this growing season, causing a significant disruption to access of freshly harvested foods as well as to farmers by losing early spring sales, we are working with the Iowa City Farmers Market staff and others to explore how we can collaborate on a Contact-Free Farmers Market. Our new online inventory management and order platform will be live soon and we already have the cool storage and transportation capacity to support meeting this challenge. We feel compelled to find a way to utilize our resources in this way during this historic time. More information will be available soon about this opportunity. If you are interested in helping us plan, order a box or have other feedback, please contact me!

Produce to Food Pantries

One of the effects of COVID-19 is that local organizations working to reduce food insecurity are under more pressure. They have less volunteers at a time when unemployment has skyrocketed leading to an increased community need for what these organizations offer. At the same time, our “roommates” Table to Table has had to reduce their food rescue routes in order to comply with social distancing and other COVID-19 volunteer-related guidelines, which has led to a decrease in the availability of fresh produce at food pantries and free meal sites. In response, I proposed to our friends at the Johnson County Health and Human Services Department that we divert some of our [Farm Stand](#) program funding that was slated for May to mitigate the reduced amount of produce available at food pantries and meal sites from mid- March through April. This request was APPROVED and by the end of this week we will have provided 633 pounds of local vegetables to five hunger-relief agencies with a few weeks more to go. The need may not decrease in May, so we will keep you updated as ways we can help address this challenge.

Virtual Farm to School

As far as our Farm to School program, as you can imagine, most of our programming is on hold until the future start return date becomes more clear. Until then, we are exploring virtual ways to offer our educational programs so that in case school continues to be delayed, we can still offer farm, nutrition and food system education to students in Iowa. We have already postponed our School Garden Workshop that was scheduled for April 9th indefinitely and are

currently unsure if we are able to host our three Farmer Fairs we had planned for this spring. Fall planning continues as Iowa Local Food day lands on October 7 this year!

Virtual Farmer Advisory Meeting

Field to Family strives to meet the needs of all stakeholders in our community food system. One of the ways we connect with our advisors and stakeholders is to host an annual Advisory Council meeting. This event was held on January 25 and materials from that meeting can be [viewed here](#). However, with our new reality, we feel a virtual check-in with our farmer partners is in order so that not only can we provide an avenue to share resources, but also to create a way to open dialogue and engage local farmers. To that end, we have scheduled a Zoom meeting on April 9, 2020 at 12:30 PM for regional producers. A Zoom link will be sent out to all who [RSVP here](#) to attend. If this time/date doesn't work for you, please contact me directly to schedule a time that does at director@fieldtofamily.org.

Our priority is to ensure we are doing our part to keep our community safe. Field to Family's work continues though it may look a bit differently. Our 2020 Work Plan is ambitious and requires us to increase staff to meet our goals. We are hiring! And feel lucky to be able to do so. Please help us spread the word on the following openings:

[Communications and Events Manager](#) Due April 22, 2020

[Farm Stand Internship](#) Due April 22, 2020

[Food Hub Operations Manager](#) Due May 4, 2020.

Thanks for reading so far! I hope you are all healthy and safe! We could not be in a position to respond to this crisis if it wasn't for support from our community. THANK YOU!!

For those of us who are working from home or in the fields, it can be isolating and connecting with others is important. Please feel free to connect with me and share your experience during this unprecedented time. Hope to hear from you soon!

With gratitude,



Michelle Kenyon
[Field to Family](#) Director

Help us rise to the challenges brought on by COVID-19 as we continue to increase access to local foods and support local farmers by providing [Support Field to Family today!](#)

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Learn more about Field to Family's work in 2019 and plans for 2020 [here](#) (links to a pdf on our site)!