What are the things that we can recommend in the short-term to help see the agricultural sector through this pandemic?

**Financial Assistance**

1. Many Maine farmers and food entrepreneurs will need access to financial capital throughout the growing season to help stabilize their cash flow and enable them to contribute to Maine’s food supply. Increased funding, perhaps through the CARES Act, targeting those farmers and food entrepreneurs who rely heavily on sales to restaurants, retail and grocery stores and institutions would help stabilize the financial condition of Maine’s agricultural sector.

2. Cold hard cash. Requests for a farmer relief fund.

3. Uncertainty makes loan programs, even low/zero interest loan programs less effective as farmers will not take on more debt.

4. Provisions addressing COVID-related costs for essential businesses (including farms)

5. Direct Support for Organic Farms, Diversified Farms, and Farms Servicing Local Markets

6. Streamlined and Expanded Organic Certification Cost-Share Assistance

7. Assistance to Dairy Farmers through the Tier program

8. Provisions addressing COVID-related costs for essential businesses (including farms)

9. Ensure federal funding flows to producers in Maine.

10. Retool state grant/loan programs to better serve producers during this challenging time and increase resiliency for the future (and possibly for the categories described above for federal funding)

11. Could the Governor issue an executive order to change the parameters for the grant/loan programs since the Legislature is adjourned and it is unclear if it will return this year?

12. Loan forgiveness with federal/state/private lenders

13. Tax abatement?

14. Incentivize private lenders to provide loans to farms at reduced rates.

15. Ensure farms have access to capital for necessary improvements to and investments in their farm businesses.

16. Direct payments/assistance to farmers for loss of revenue.

17. FSA Disaster Loans

18. SBA Programs:
   a. a) PPP: (1) Provide more funding for program
      i. (2) Need more flexibility in terms of the timeline for use
   b) EIDL: (1) Make available for farm businesses

19. Direct purchases of products:
   a) Provide relief for potato and wild blueberry sectors
   b) USDA/DACF purchase products and provide to emergency food system
**Technical Assistance**

1. Provide technical assistance to farmers and food entrepreneurs to help them re-emerge from this pandemic in a viable way. Assistance could focus on priority need areas such as: managing monthly cash flow, use of technology in problem-solving and establishing a robust online presence.

2. Provide individual "check-ins" with farms or ag service providers to assess needs (without relying completely on surveys). Farmer Zoom is a great idea, but many farmers really need a phone call or something more personal, and may not be at all comfortable with Zoom.

3. Some communities (Amish, other) may have more trouble accessing or utilizing government financial stimulus offers. Mobilizing some staff to assist, and also being sure to follow up with applications should be helpful. I have heard first-person accounts of applications being "lost" (buried) on a banker's desk, and thus unfunded.

**Marketing Assistance**

1. A statewide marketing campaign should be developed to increase consumer spending on Maine food products by Mainers and out-of-state visitors. This will increase business revenues, boost employment and improve business success. In addition, increased funding to programs like SNAP and Maine’s food banks would increase revenues to farmers and reduce food insecurity in Maine.

2. Facilitating the set up of more Farmdrop (or similar) sites to aggregate products from smaller farms that were previously wholesaling to restaurants (like ones with a single product, like asparagus, that make on farm sales less practical).

3. Increased need to market the resources available to this industry, where can they find information on programs, services, etc.?

4. Marketing help to adapt marketing efforts—moving things online and maintaining direct-to-consumer sales.

5. Forecasts & the future – growers and vendors are uncertain about demand in three months and it is impacting production decisions.

6. Explore ways of expanding market opportunities, both inside and outside of Maine
   - Increase the state’s promotion of Maine-grown foods and farm products
   - Provide technical assistance specifically-related to marketing to new customers
   - Digital marketing training
   - Production support
Looking forward we will need to know what the gathering restrictions are going to be sooner rather than later. Planning events that could potentially make up lost sales is hard when there is no real long term plan for opening and when, it does come, it could be pulled the day before the event. Our fall event is designed to be one that involves many different business types from maple producers to lodging, restaurants, and breweries.

To stabilize we need to be able to continue with the normal events that we usually have that involve mass gatherings. To sustain and grow we will need to work on our fall event promotions. This fall maple event is envisioned to be one that would become an annual event. This would provide much needed income that could make up for what was lost this year.

**Labor Concerns**
1. Support for H-2A and clarification on how it is working.
2. Health of ag labor, availability of COVID-19 testing.
3. Farm Labor Accommodations to Continue Production of Organic Food During the Pandemic
4. Address challenges related to farmworker housing.

**Materials**
1. Compost shortage: between lack of restaurant waste and higher demand from homeowners, farmers (particularly Organic) are having trouble finding compost. Maybe increased municipal collection could help this?

8. Farmers are still having trouble locating PPE. Bulk buy PPE and cleaning supplies and sell to farmers at cost (or maybe even subsidize?)

**Health & Welfare of Ag Sector**
1. Create a position within state government that is concerned with the mental health of farmers and farm workers and communities. Look to Minnesota as a model (See information below). There is work right now with federal funds for a Northeast Farm and Stress Assistance Network and Extension is part of this. Know what's happening with the beginning farmer resource network and Extension in order to connect the dots when applying federal funds.

**Food Insecurity**
1. In the immediate, get financial supports, food distribution systems in place meet the tremendous needs of food pantries and hungry people with the need for a place for food to go.

2. Flexibility in USDA Nutrition Program Rules and Spending Needed to Allow Low Income Consumers Greater Access to Nutritious Food During the Pandemic.
3. Funds and Procedures for Procuring Organic Food for Local Food Banks and Community Organizations.

4. Divert excess food into food bank network—would need significant considerations in regards to transportation, storage (cold and frozen), processing (bulk to individual units, etc.).

5. Allow for online/telephone SNAP purchases/nutrition incentives.

6. Increase support to the Mainers Feeding Mainers Program.

7. Support nutrition programs that connect consumers to Maine-produced food, including implementation of nutrition incentive programs at bigger chain grocery store.

8. Support the work of community food councils focused on food access issues.

9. Continue to expand initiatives to bring together emergency food systems and infrastructure and local food systems and infrastructure to simultaneously meet the needs of Maine farmers and people in need of food.

**Infrastructure**

1. Increase local processing infrastructure, including expanding the investment in on-farm and post-harvest infrastructure, as well as shared infrastructure. To possibly include washing, prepping food for convenience markets, packing, freezing, dehydrating, cold storage, packaging for the consumer.

2. Explore Public-Private partnerships and cooperative ownership for dairy, livestock, seafood and produce processing.
Supporting Information for the Ag Sector

Maine Rapid Business Survey:  https://umaine.edu/soe/maine-rapid-business-climate-survey/

This is a weekly survey sent out across the state to get an insight into what businesses are facing. Agriculture has already shown a strong response rate to this survey even in this first week. The first results will be available on Monday (June 8) and a copy of the ag results will be made available.

The Senate ACF Committee will be meeting next Thursday, June 11 at 9:30 AM.

The Maine State House will remain closed to the public in the period covering this scheduled meeting.

Members of the public may listen to the meeting through the internet at: http://legislature.maine.gov/Audio/#228

There will also be an opportunity for the public to access a video stream of the proceedings. This is the link to the YouTube stream that will be live for the meeting next Thursday. https://youtu.be/tyhPpelNRGQ

New York’s Ag Response to COVID-19

As the New York Forward plan is implemented across the state, businesses of all kinds are required to have a written COVID-19 safety plan in place. Both essential agricultural businesses that have remained open throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and those non-food related agricultural businesses who will re-open must have a safety plan. A task force of Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) specialists developed a new set of resources to help farms comply with this requirement and efficiently prepare plans during this busy time of the year. We are proud to have been on the team that created the templates released today!

The NY Forward Business Safety Plan Support for Farms resource collection contains:

- **Plan Templates.** Download these blank forms that you can use electronically to write your plan or simply print out and hand write your plan. Available in Adobe PDF and Microsoft Word formats.
- **Considerations and Examples for Your Plan.** The CCE team prepared two new documents that provide ideas for your consideration and examples of how you might complete your plan for common farm situations. The main document here is intended for most farms engaged in production agriculture and a companion document is for those farms that include retail sales as part of their business.
- **Key References and Support Documents.** A huge number of resources have been created since March. We have selected the most relevant documents that farms need to complete business safety plans, including guidance documents
from state government and best management practice (BMP) documents from Cornell experts. These references focus on specific types of farms and their specialized needs.

Also included are quite a few related references and support articles. Access all of these resources on the Cornell Ag Workforce website.

You can also reach out to the CCE Broome County Agriculture Team with any questions!

For Additional Information:

The NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets has created an official COVID-19 resource page offering details and latest guidance as it relates to agriculture in the state.

The Cornell Small Farms Program is keeping a list of resources for farms to build resiliency through potential impacts from COVID-19.

The Cornell EDEN website is the hub of information for COVID-19 issues and resources.

The Cornell Ag Workforce is a great resource for updates on labor management issues and programs and policies related to ag workforce issues and COVID-19.

The Institute for Food Safety at Cornell University answers questions around the risks associated with food production with useful links to expert resources to ensure that a safe and robust food supply is maintained.

Minnesota Rural Mental Health Specialists

Ted Matthews: 320-266-2390
Monica McConkey: 218-280-7785
Ted and Monica work with farmers throughout Minnesota. No cost; no paperwork. The service is available thanks to funds from the Minnesota Legislature. While you are welcome to contact either Monica or Ted, Monica generally serves the area north of Highway 12 (which runs from Ortonville through Willmar to the Twin Cities) and Ted generally serves the area south of Highway 12.

Mobile Crisis Teams

Available in every Minnesota county, mobile crisis team counselors
can respond quickly and provide in-person, short-term counseling or mental health services during a crisis or emergency. Calls are answered immediately 24 hrs/day. Responders travel in private vehicles and generally arrive within 2 hours.

**University of Minnesota Extension**

Extension helps families and small towns respond to economic, environmental, and societal challenges that affect rural Minnesota and farming communities. Its [Coping with Rural Stress](#) page points the way to financial and mental health resources.

2. Child care provision for farmers. Elder assistance. No centers open right now may be impacting farm production and more help with the family side (not just field help) may be needed.