



The Honorable Governor Jay Inslee
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 40002
Olympia, WA 98504-0002



April 1, 2020

Re: Request for Emergency Support for Food Distribution

Dear Governor Inslee,

Thank you for your leadership and the hard work of your Administration to respond during this unprecedented public health and economic crisis that has resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes your appointment of the State Food Security Coordination Team and its inclusion of our organizations to work side by side with state agencies and philanthropists in direct communication about our shared mission and work to ensure that no Washingtonian goes hungry during this crisis.

We write to you with the full support of the coordination team to ask you to set aside \$120 million in state and federal disaster relief funding for statewide emergency food distribution. Unless funding is made immediately available for the mass purchasing of food for our state's emergency food system, we anticipate facing a critical shortfall of food for food banks by April 10.

According to a recent needs assessment that our agencies completed for the coordination team, **we estimate that 1.6 million Washingtonians are now at risk of food insecurity.** This is double the number of individuals in our state that struggled with putting food on their tables before this pandemic. At the same time, the food supply for charitable distributions is quickly dwindling: increased grocery store sales by those that can afford to buy stockpiles has resulted in as much as a **70% reduction in grocery store donations to food banks.** Stores have imposed quantity restrictions on direct purchases by food pantries in order to reserve food stocks for individual household purchasing.

The normal channels for federal food distribution funding and federal commodities are moving too slowly for us to keep up with demand. USDA purchases commodities that farmers can't sell, making these available for food banks to distribute through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP.) However, the process results in a three-month delay between when food is ordered and when it arrives in our state for distribution. Even though Washington will receive over \$5 million in additional TEFAP commodities thanks to the two most recent federal COVID-19 relief packages, **Washington won't receive those food products until the beginning of July.** Further, TEFAP includes policies and regulations that restrict the distribution of food in ways that will create unnecessary barriers to the rapid deployment of a comprehensive emergency food response to assist Washingtonians facing hunger.

With permission from USDA, WSDA's Food Assistance Programs have moved up the timeline for distributing commodities that were allocated for May and June in order to help infuse our system with food to meet increased need. Our own programs are sorting and organizing all existing food items stored in our warehouses into emergency food boxes for distribution through local food pantries. We have also recently established a coordinated fund, asking for private sector support of a comprehensive emergency food response. But unless we receive immediate support from state and federal disaster relief funds issued to our state, **we are in immediate danger of a 2.5 month long food shortage crisis for our emergency food system.**

A comprehensive public health response necessitates rapid funding, the elimination of barriers to access, and support for the distribution of nutritious food to all who are struggling to put food on their tables—those households that struggled with hunger before this pandemic and the thousands of individuals across our state who have been displaced from jobs or have seen reduced hours from the stay home and business closure orders that have been imperative to our slowing the spread of infection. Nutritious food is an essential ingredient to keep those individuals healthy so that they have strong immune systems to help fight off the disease and can remain in good physical health to return to work when this crisis is over. Please help us meet this need with immediate financial support.

Sincerely,



Linda Nageotte
CEO, Food Lifeline



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CEO, Northwest Harvest



Jason Clark
CEO, Second Harvest

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