



**NEWS RELEASE For Immediate Release, March 31, 2021**

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## **Produce Working Group Delivers 30 Food Box Recommendations to USDA**

*Most Comprehensive Stakeholder Effort to Date on Addressing a Successor Program*

(WASHINGTON, D.C. – March 31, 2021) – Today, United Fresh Produce Association’s Produce Box Working Group presented USDA with a [set of 30 recommendations](#) that would help guide a new program around produce food boxes. This is in response to USDA’s call for recommendations and comments on a successor program “to the temporary food box purchase program created in April 2020 in response to the rapidly developing crisis within the food supply chain and increased joblessness due to COVID-19.”

In November of 2020, United Fresh convened a meeting of the entire produce supply chain to dive into what challenges and opportunities a new produce food box program would look like. Over 100 individuals and companies participated in the working group which included 30 nonprofit feeding organizations. This is the most comprehensive effort to date from a stakeholder group to review and assess the current program and offer programmatic and detail recommendations to USDA. As part of the comments submitted to USDA, there were three overriding recommendations:

1. Return to Produce-Only Boxes
2. Eliminate low cost as determining factor in contract decisions.
3. Provide expanded, smaller contracts, including multiple awards in states and USDA Regions.

“From our meetings, there was a shared desire in the working group to maximize the nutritional value for box recipients and to improve the box quality and service by a more equitable distribution of contracts across the country. That was the overriding goal of this effort,” said Mollie Van Lieu, Senior Director of Nutrition Policy for United Fresh.

“This program has demonstrated that the way USDA has traditionally procured and distributed food, especially in fresh produce, has been limited and has not supported the majority of produce farmers, and distributors, and doesn't make it easy to provide nutritional security to low-income children and families. Most importantly this program has recognized that government private partnerships work on a large scale to address a significant need in our country. To that end we believe this program has a strong foundation to continue not just as we continue to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic but as another tool for USDA to reach its goals of having healthy and nutritious food delivered to our most vulnerable populations,” said Robert Guenther, Senior Vice President of Public Policy for United Fresh.

### **Quotes from Working Group Participants**

*“The USDA Farmers to Families Box program represents the best in American ingenuity. The program innovatively knitted together supporting America’s farms, the fresh food commercial supply chain, and feeding the growing food insecure population. It left our company forever changed by the higher purpose of serving our fellow Americans who needed it most.”*

Joan Daleo, Old Tyme Produce, St. Charles, MO.

*“Working with shippers, nonprofits, and distributors inside the united committee gave us an all-sides perspective to recommend to the USDA.”*

Steve Monteverde, Monteverde, Inc. Crafton, PA.

*“This program has provided USDA, the fresh produce industry, and nonprofit entities a unique opportunity to partner with each other and bring healthy and fresh produce to those in need during an unprecedented time. As our country continues to get back to normalcy, we should not discard the innovative ways this program has been able to help so many people and families.”*

Tom Brugato, Pacific Coast Fruit Company, Portland, OR.

*“The collaboration and comprehensive views provided by the United Fresh working groups have been a breath of fresh air for the potential continuation of the Farmers to Families Food Box Program. The ability for 100 separate working members to come together and agree upon a consensus of multiple recommendations that we believe would have a positive impact on the program and provide added nutritional benefits to the end user will make a huge difference as this program continues.”*

Cagney Korbin, Five Star Gourmet Foods, Naples, FL.

*“The USDA Farmers to Families Food Box Program has fundamentally changed the way we look at fresh produce distribution. This phenomenal program has allowed us to create a bridge connecting farm-level food waste with urban and rural food deserts, creating equal access to fresh fruits and vegetables in our communities. This could not have happened without the lightning-quick actions of the USDA, and the critical work being done by food banks and faith-based distribution partners!”*

Steve Brazeel, Sunterra Produce Traders, Inc., Newport Beach, CA.

*“This program has created an amazing opportunity for us to leverage our national, regional, local and hyperlocal network of farmers, distributors and 501©(3) partners to deploy fresh healthful food to those in need. While there are always improvements that can be made to exactly how the program looks and operates, our success working on this program has resulted in sustaining families in communities small and large, rural and urban, all across the country, while keeping fresh product from going to waste, keeping the lights on at more than 15 local food distributors and saving more than 600 jobs around the country. Our broad and deep reach into communities has enabled us to achieve a 99+% success rate on our award.”*

Melissa Ackerman, Produce Alliance, LLC, Chicago, IL

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### **About United Fresh Produce Association**

Founded in 1904, the **United Fresh Produce Association** brings together companies across every segment of the fresh produce supply chain, including growers, shippers, fresh-cut processors, wholesalers, distributors, retailers, foodservice operators, industry suppliers and allied associations. We empower industry leaders to shape sound government policy. We deliver the resources and expertise companies need to succeed in managing complex business and technical issues. We provide the training and development individuals need to advance their careers in produce. Through these endeavors, we unite our industry with a common purpose – to build long-term value for our members and grow produce consumption.