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USDA Farmers to Families Food Box Program Snubs Wisconsin—once, twice, three times!

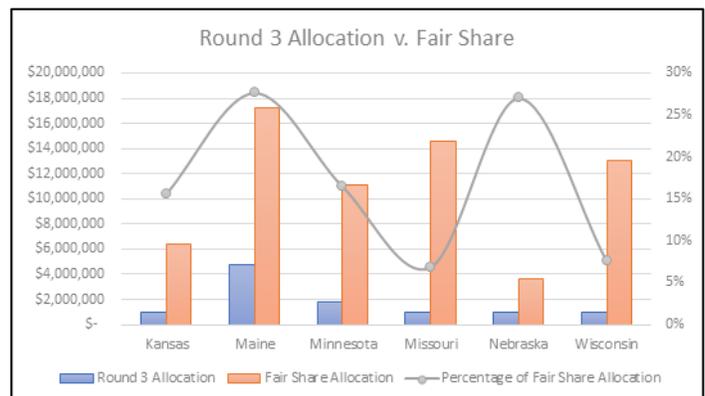
Wisconsin further underserved by \$12M while thousands of families to go without food; thousands of indigenous and rural people are left hungry due poor administrative oversight

MILWAUKEE – (September 24, 2020) – The third round of the United State Department of Agriculture (USDA)’s *Farmers to Families Food Box* program was announced Sept. 18, allocating an additional \$1 billion to farmers and food producers nationwide as a continuation of the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program. Wisconsin has been underrepresented in all rounds of the program while Wisconsin’s hungry line up by the carload for assistance that has now been completely severed.

Wisconsin’s *Farmers to Families Food Box* allocation represents just 7.6% of its “fair share” using the USDA’s allocation formula. This devastating decision to once again ignore Wisconsin has abruptly ended food aid to Tribal Nations and rural communities whose food banks were serving people of color, the rural poor and the indigenous.

As a response to the increasingly devastating COVID-19 pandemic, the USDA announced the *Farmers to Families Food Box* program in April 2020. This unique program offered three billion dollars in federal aid to support U.S. Farmers and food producers and to bolster supply chains that were hit hard by the pandemic. Food originally produced for schools and restaurants were to be purchased and allocated by aggregating groups, who would box and deliver the foods to meet the needs of the hungry nationwide, including the tens of millions of recently unemployed.

The USDA typically distributes its resources across the nation using an allocation formula that incorporates each state’s poverty and unemployment levels. By that formula, Wisconsin should have received \$44 million worth of Farmers to Families Food Boxes in the first round. Instead, Wisconsin aggregators received just \$9 million in funds. The graph below shows the bottom six states of the fair share allocation for round three—Wisconsin is the second lowest at just 8% of its deserved funds.



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PG. 2 // Wisconsin Underserved in USDA Program

Hunger Task Force, a Milwaukee-based food bank and anti-hunger organization, applied for \$37M worth of funding in the initial round of the *Farmers to Families Food Box* program, which included a detailed aggregation plan to include Wisconsin farmers, food producers, farm cooperatives and food pantries statewide. Hunger Task Force organizes the Hunger Relief Federation of Wisconsin—a statewide coalition of 109 anti-hunger organizations, including 10 Tribal Nations. Though these resources and experience could have ensured adequate food distribution and representation statewide, Hunger Task Force was not selected for the program.

Even with a distressingly low allotment, Hunger Task Force has worked with two companies—Gourmet Gorilla and Gordon Food Service—who received awards in the first two rounds of the *Farmers to Families* program to direct the food to 14 distribution hubs in Wisconsin, arranging 20 truckloads of food, delivered weekly. These hubs service more than 28 emergency food organizations, including 10 Tribal Nations, across the state, which have served at least 300,000 individuals living in extreme poverty in rural, urban and underserved areas.

In many instances, Hunger Task Force arranged and covered the cost of transportation companies to deliver the food to these areas (incurring nearly \$66,000 in unreimbursed expenses), though the USDA directed aggregators to meet this need.

The announcement of the third round of funding eliminated both aggregators that were serving Wisconsin and resulted in an immediate loss of truckloads of food—with no notice. Across the state, families have arrived at distribution sites only to be turned away with no food. This decision made by the USDA has left many Wisconsin communities in chaos.

Food pantries and Tribal Nations statewide have expressed extreme concern about the lack of support they will receive because of Wisconsin's underrepresentation (see [video](#) below).

Tribal communities have operated with Safer-at-Home orders since mid-March, and are now left without food and answers. Wisconsin is currently experiencing peak levels of coronavirus cases and hungry families are more in need than ever.

A collection of letters from Wisconsin emergency food providers are available [here](#). These memos illustrate the value of the *Farmers to Families Food Box* program during an unprecedented pandemic, but also the suffering and anxiety that its abrupt termination has created.



Wisconsin farmers, food producers and hungry families remain in crisis and are questioning the lack of support from the federal government. The USDA has yet to address why its decisions continue to ignore Wisconsin and why local farmers and families are left to struggle.

Hunger Task Force is Milwaukee's Free & Local food bank and Wisconsin's anti-hunger leader. The organization provides healthy and nutritious food to hungry children, families and seniors in the community absolutely free of charge. Hunger Task Force was founded in 1974 by a local advocacy group who then formed Milwaukee's first food bank. Today, Hunger Task Force is 100% supported by the community and provides a safety net of emergency food with dignity to a network of 75 food pantries, soup kitchens and homeless shelters. Through legislative analysis, education and community organizing, Hunger Task Force continues to advocate for anti-hunger policy at the local, state and federal level. For more information, visit HungerTaskForce.org.