

4.22.2020 Webinar Notes:

CARES Act, PPP, and Package 4 Impact on Maine Farms with Chellie Pingree

Chellie Pingree:

There are an awful lot of uncertainties for Maine farmers, people are facing a lot of challenges.

Not knowing what our summer is going to look like... will we have a tourist season, open restaurants, summer help and labor?

We've kept this in mind in planning the packages thus far (3 packages so far – starting on the fourth)

Today:

- Opportunity for farmers with SBA loans
- There is \$ set aside for people who use small banks and credit unions.
- We're working to make it clearer on who can apply for these loans.
- Economic disaster loans weren't available to farmers in the past, but NOW they are. With a \$10,000-grant provision available immediately.

9 billion dollars put into that last package that was supposed to assist agriculture. 2.1 billion of that is to go to specialty crop producers.

These packages depend on rulemaking.

Original support payments are for losses experienced between January 2020 and April 15th.

- This may help dairy farmers but does not account for seasonal farmers with a summer crop.
- The goal is to help ALL farmers of ALL sizes.

The USDA is also aiming to purchase commodities from farmers and distribute to foodbanks – we're suspicious about that...

They may distribute these commodities, but there will likely be a middleman detaching it from its origin.

Other efforts: Online purchasing for SNAPP, expansion of programs, etc. ← long list that can be distributed upon request. ← Contact Donna Coffin (donna.coffin@maine.edu)

Q & A: (Questions are in bold and answers from Chellie (and others) below).

We are a farm just getting started so how might we participate as we can't project losses:

- Good question. We don't know the answer yet. We're happy to get back to you. You may be eligible for the emergency disaster funds program.

With regard to the equestrian businesses here in Maine, how will we be able to access relief? We have applied for PPP and SBA EIDL We've been told there are no more funds. PPP was applied for thru Camden National and the SBA told us last week money has depleted, and they cannot even tell us if we qualify. What do we do from here?

- As soon as this bill passes go back to Camden National. They wouldn't have qualified before, but now they will. Follow-up ASAP
- There is \$500 million set aside in the Dept. of Agriculture that is specifically going to the business that haven't been covered ← Hemp, etc., equestrian may qualify.

Hemp or cannabis farmers are having trouble getting federal funding – please call our office if you are struggling with this.

Similar question to Tamara- as a farmer and ASP- how do we advise farmers that haven't prepared to apply for PPP- is it worth their time doing so?

- It's really a farm-by-farm decision, because there's a lot of risk.
- However – at the end of the loan program, you must be ready to get those workers back on your payroll to qualify for the loan forgiveness.
- Banks had to close on loans within 8 days, if they don't have a closing date, they should check with their bank.

Do farms that provide non-food sources have an opportunity to get aid. I work for AgrAbility and have Shepherds who normally sell their wool and pelts via fairs that have been cancelled due to COVID-19.

- Look for the \$500 million set aside in the Dept. of Agriculture for diverse crops.

Those who are diversified are getting hit in a what that is harder to quantify.

Though we sell food, many of us also sell fiber and have had significant losses from shows cancelled during the time period, and beyond. Is there help for us too, even though fiber is not a food product?

- I think it absolutely is and we're going to do everything we can to get you aid.
- If you've already experienced losses you're in a much better position.

Will guidance about whether we should expect a tourist season in Maine and New England going to come from Federal CDC or governors and state CDC's?

- Re-opening will be on a state-by-state basis. But it's going to be very different. If they open restaurants in a few weeks, will people even want to go or financially be able to?

Agritourism (Airbnb rental, on-farm catering) is a significant portion of our farm business - we are concerned about loss of income this summer - do any of these programs apply to this aspect of our business?

- I feel for you. If we can continue to expand the PPP program, that is the best bet
- Right now, SBA loans are the best thing for those dependent on tourists and visitors.
- EIDL can be applied for online through SBA's website:
<https://disasterloan.sba.gov/ela/Information/EIDLLoans>

Any updates on the recent closure of the border to migration and how that's going to affect migrant labor this summer?

- We're very concerned about that.
- Previous guidance said that workers already here could extend their stay, but that workers can't come in.
- In Maine, we don't have the bulk of our workers here right now.
- Workers are also needing to be quarantined as they come in.
- We don't know a lot right now, but we're working with DHS and other agencies, we should be receiving more intel on this soon.

I liked your editorial, can you tell us more about federal efforts to ensure testing is more widespread? As a market farmer and market manager, I'm pretty concerned that this may be key in helping people feel safe coming to markets versus to our farm.

- We just put 25 billion more into the bill we'll vote on tomorrow.
- These supplies are being fought over internationally. It's really a state-by-state basis.
- Access to tests would boost confidence in people going out.

Can self-employed farmers apply for unemployment?

- YES – that is the best way to get aid right now. Anyone who files a 1099.
- Whatever you normally would have qualified for in Maine, you get an additional \$600/week.
- The program is not quite available yet – it should be available this week or next.
- Self-employed folks in Maine are not yet eligible for unemployment.
<https://www.maine.gov/unemployment/>

There was some discussion about removing restrictions around compensation for farm workers, particularly immigrant laborers. Has this been resolved?

- It's certainly a talk. **Farm workers are frontline workers**, some are in riskier situations – being required to work with the public and go to work.
- There're a lot of big problems here

If I have lost some of my income but not all can I get a prorated amount of unemployment?

- Yes – you'll need to work with them on that though.

If we are accepted for the PPP, can we prepay our help for the season from that fund before the deadline to spend the money?

- That's a good question, I don't think you're technically allowed. I'd have to investigate that.
- You are able to give your employees a raise.

If we run our help as 1099 subcontractors- how do we work the PPP?

- We'd have to investigate that. We're not sure how that will work.
- 1099 subcontractors may have to seek PPP for themselves.
- By the end of the week both PPP and Idle programs should be replenished. The Idle program is now available to farmers, wasn't before.

Any chance there is going to be some tariff or relief funds to fix our shorter chain supply of meat here in Maine?

- We're trying to look at this upcoming infrastructure bill to help with that.
- We have a ton of holes in our food chain and it's in dire need of help.

Chellie: I feel for everyone trying to figure out what to do and how to move forward. You're welcome to contact my office or contact me by email. We've come so far as a state agriculturally, I'd hate to see the state digress from this.

Cam O'Brien – 12,000 small business have received aid thus far. We hope that will continue

Morgan Urquhart of Congressman Golden's office – Second everything said today. If you have questions, please reach out.

Olin Hartkopf – feel free to reach out to our office as well. I'd also like to echo everything said today.