

April 20, 2020

VIA EMAIL

Teresa Miller, Secretary
Pennsylvania Department of Human Services
625 Forster Street
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Russell Redding, Secretary
Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture
2301 North Cameron Street
Harrisburg, PA 17110

Re: Safe Food Purchasing Options for SNAP Recipients

Dear Secretary Miller and Secretary Redding,

We are writing out of concern for the health and safety of our community and the economic well-being of our local food growers and producers. In order for people to adhere to Center for Disease Control (CDC) social distancing recommendations, to reduce the number of people grocery store workers come into direct contact with, and to enable farmers to facilitate more direct-to-customer sales, we ask that you support retailers in developing ways to accept EBT payments in more environments, such as curbside pickup and payment on delivery, and online sales.

Delivery options need to be available to SNAP households. We know that more than one-third of SNAP households include a family member who is an older adult or someone with a disability. Prior to this pandemic, many of these families relied on ride sharing or public transportation options to go grocery shopping. They now find themselves struggling to find someone to go grocery shopping for them.

Delivery and pickup options that include online EBT payment will allow communities to better serve vulnerable SNAP households. The guidance that USDA has provided about offering payment at pickup options is helpful, but it still means that someone has to present the EBT card at the store. This leaves our vulnerable neighbors to find someone they trust with their EBT card and PIN who is willing to go to the store on their behalf.

We have a number of community groups who are able to organize volunteers to help with grocery pickup for struggling families, seniors, and people with disabilities. However, having volunteers pick up and use someone's EBT card is challenging, not only because of the obvious security risks, but also because giving a community volunteer access to their physical EBT card prior to picking up a purchase requires close contact and extra travel.

We recognize that retailers have many challenges: packing foods for pickup without items being paid for in advance, delivery costs, and keeping stores stocked and clean with limited staff. We also recognize that implementing online EBT purchases requires a great deal of technical changes and investments, and that retailers who do not already have online purchasing capabilities will have to make significant efforts to enable those purchases.

In addition to grocers struggling to meet this new demand, we are also seeing great pressure being placed on our local farms and producers. Many have relied on sales to schools and restaurants and are now relying more direct-to-customer sales through markets and farm stands to make ends meet. They need access to resources to help facilitate delivery options, including mobile EBT equipment.

We know that addressing these serious challenges requires cooperation across departments. We are asking you to:

- 1) Promote the use and availability of mobile EBT processing equipment so payment can be accepted on delivery or curbside pickup. Retailers should be encouraged to acquire mobile EBT processing equipment to accept payment upon pickup or delivery. This should be included in recommendations for life-sustaining retailers to promote social distancing.
- 2) Expedite soliciting requests and approving grants that provide mobile EBT equipment to farmers markets and farm stands.
- 3) Support legislative efforts to help offset delivery costs, and help facilitate these reimbursements to vendors if passed. Because SNAP benefits cannot pay for delivery fees and because SNAP households are often too low-income to afford delivery fees, retailers should be reimbursed for delivery costs to SNAP households. An example of such legislation is S.3563, introduced by Senator Casey.
- 4) Submit an application to USDA to join the online SNAP Purchasing Pilot promptly so that retailers who are already certified can offer this service as soon as possible. The application should also state that:
 - a) DHS will develop a transparent and accessible option for new retailers and groups of retailers who share an online purchasing platform to be able to join the pilot in the future.
 - b) DHS plans to work with the PA Department of Agriculture to help facilitate a shared online purchasing platform for PA producers and growers to accept EBT payments online.

As advocates, farmers, food banks, and retailers, we hope to be partners in these endeavors to address the needs of Pennsylvanians.

Respectfully submitted,

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