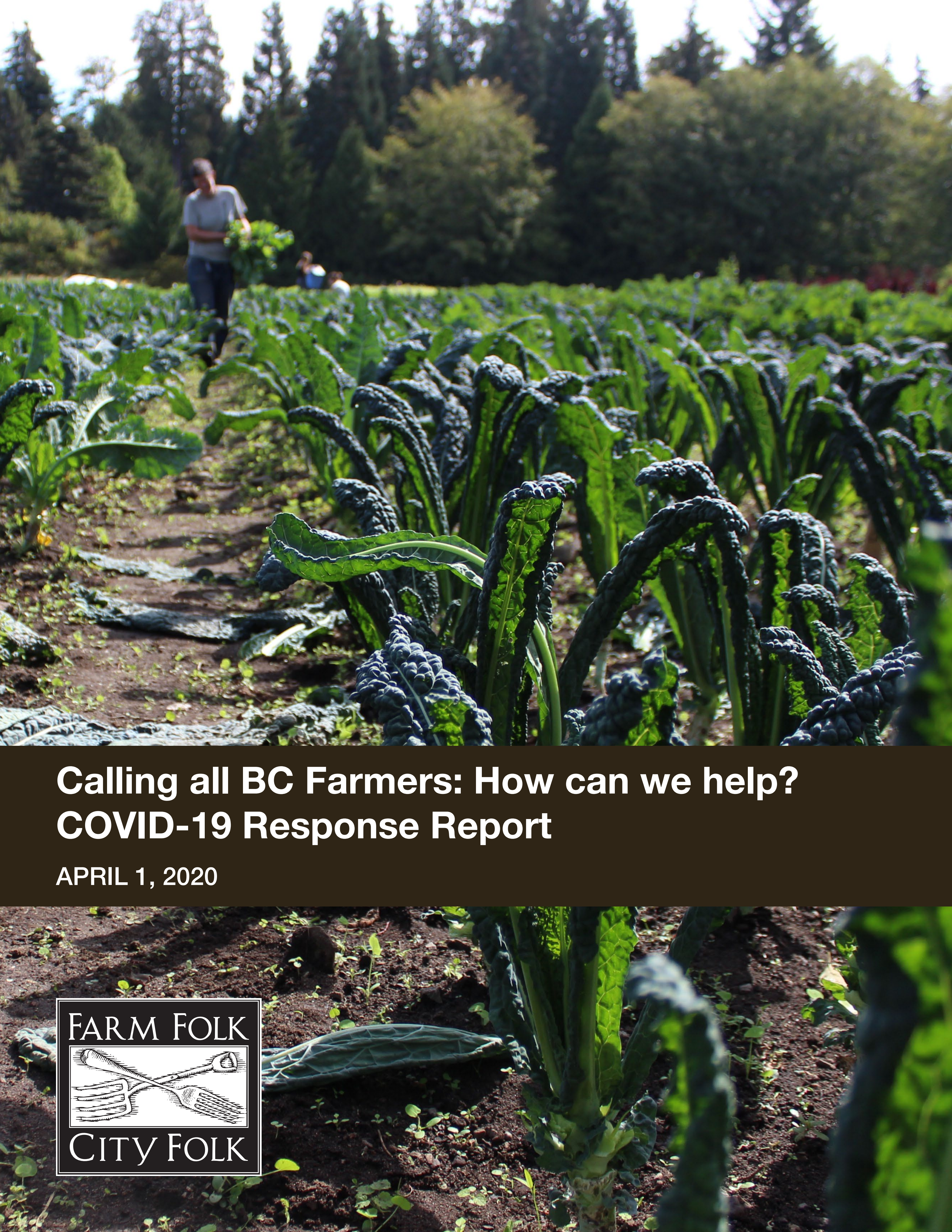


# Calling all BC Farmers: How can we help?
# COVID-19 Response Report

APRIL 1, 2020

FARM FOLK CITY FOLK

## WHY WE CARE

The global pandemic is a wake up call for all of us, about what is truly important: great people and great food. While toilet paper hoarding has hit the media, folks are also stocking up on seeds, filling their freezers with protein, and planting gardens. It's impossible not to think about where your food comes from at times like these, and want to have some control over your supplies.

Our global food system is vulnerable to economic, environmental, and social crises of all shapes and sizes. Food can travel thousands of miles, across multiple borders, and pass through the hands of dozens of people before landing on our plates. Now is the time to be asking ourselves how do we create a resilient, local food system where producers and eaters can easily withstand disturbance and change? This report is one small step in that direction.

# INTRODUCTION

On March 18, 2020, FarmFolk CityFolk (FFCF) circulated a short survey to BC farmers with the goal of getting a quick snapshot of the impacts farmers[1] are seeing due to the COVID-19 crisis, asking four questions:

- How is your farm business being impacted right now?
- What impacts do you anticipate this year?
- What support do you need right now?
- What support do you anticipate needing this year?

The survey was circulated via the FFCF newsletter list, social media channels, and via partner organizations. 96 responses were received over the course of 6 days. The data has been coded and reviewed by the KPU Institute for Sustainable Food Systems. Quotes included are directly from survey responses, and while we have collected names and contact info for specific follow up, are used anonymously here.

The global situation is moving incredibly fast, and some of the themes that emerged here have already been addressed by fast acting provincial and federal governments. We hope this report will help personalize the issues, and identify some questions for further exploration and next steps that government and nonprofits can take.

[1] When we use the term 'farmers' in this report, it refers to farmers who responded to this survey.

# SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESULTS

BC farmers are seeing a range of impacts to the COVID-19 crisis, and need a range of supports. Four key themes emerged from the survey responses including: financial considerations, labour, accessing and finding sales channels and communications campaign. Summary of each theme is discussed below.

## FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The biggest concern for farmers right now is financial, especially around lack or loss of sales revenue with 47% of respondents indicating immediate losses, and 73% fearing losses later this year. While 11% of respondents indicated a mild or no impact on their sales right away, this is primarily as it is early in the season and fields are “still covered in snow” and they “don’t have anything to sell till late April or May.” With restaurants being closed, events cancelled, and loss of visitors to farm sales sites, the impacts for many are immediate and extreme.

With restaurants closing, one farmer “went from 90 clients to 4 in less than a week.” Another indicated that “with Seedy Saturdays cancelled, [I immediately] lost thousands of dollars in income.”

Requests for immediate and long term financial support include income support, mortgage and rent deferral and cancellation, access to credit and low/no interest loans, and support to buy materials. Some of these supports are being developed and implemented by fast moving governments daily.

A smaller number of respondents indicated their operations had completely closed for the year. One in particular noted “the landowner is taking such severe precautions he has quarantined the property and so I am unable to continue the farm.”

On the contrary, 10% of respondents indicated an increase in demand and sales. Several farmers observed that they had a quick increase in CSA and other direct to customer sales. One respondent said “we are sold out of beef and our seeds are selling like toilet paper.” Those who already had these sales channels built into their business models are more resilient.

## LABOUR

A significant concern for farmers, as of the date this survey was distributed and this time of year, is around lack of labour when the border closed, with 14% indicating this as an immediate concern and 28% looking ahead with worry to the year. As of this writing, the federal government has already made provisions to allow farm workers into Canada.

## ACCESSING AND FINDING SALES CHANNELS

With the immediate and year long loss of sales channels such as restaurants, farmers have asked for a range of support including help setting up and marketing Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Programs, and setting up online sales channels.

### Community Supported Agriculture

One respondent indicated they believe “people are signing up for CSAs out of fear.” Whatever the reason, CSAs provide farmers with a guaranteed income when they need it most, at the start of the year. One farmer indicated they “started a CSA which is not one of our usual market streams. If we can find enough members, we’ll be okay.” Helping farmers set up, manage, and market a CSA would be a great support.

Several respondents realized farmers are not the only ones to be impacted by this global health crisis, and are exploring doing a weekly paid CSA box, rather than the traditional model of paying in full at the start of the season. 3% of respondents also hoped for a government subsidy for CSAs to help both eaters and farmers at the same time, and said "I expect high demand for the next 2-3 weeks then a huge drop in demand as the income of our customers become dependent on EI. There will be far less income to spend on our products." This is worth looking into further as a win-win for folks facing reduced income, and as a way to get secure funds to farmers for the season.

### Online Sales Channels

28% of respondents indicated a desire for immediate help with a range of communications and marketing support, and 30% indicated a need for accessing and finding markets and sales outlets. Each farm sees this differently, with specific requests ranging from help setting up online sales channels and CSAs, to more general requests for 'increasing clientele'. One respondent asked for "online sales support, delivery services, a way to get goods to market, some way to show municipalities/regional districts/etc that farmers markets and local farmers are key to food security and needs based in each community."

There is clearly no one size fits all solution, and online sales and marketing channels will look different for each community and style of farming. With increased physical distancing measures, exploring online sales platforms is an obvious choice. It is also important to note that these "are farmers not web designers and the learning curve will be steep."

## COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGN

At least 16% of respondents asked for support doing public education around local food in addition to support in advertising their specific products and one noted "it would be amazing if this situation could be leveraged into even stronger societal awareness and support for BC growers and producers!" Specific comments ranged from requests to help inspire strong consumer confidence for food safety, for example "news articles that produce is safe, and farmers use food safety standards" to "marketing for the season to encourage local food buying and preserving."

## OTHER THEMES

There were a range of other themes identified in the results, and are worth mentioning here. Support for mental health was mentioned by 4% of respondents, as this is going to be a tough year for them. One person extended this to physical health, saying "I CANNOT get sick, and do not have access to health services to assist me in caring for my body."

Multiple farmers (8%) wondered if they should be stocking up on supplies, due to uncertainty about supply chains later in the year, with one saying "I'm also not sure how it's going to be accessing supplies (Soil amendments, irrigation parts, construction materials to rebuild my greenhouse that collapsed this winter, etc). This places an additional financial burden early in the season before revenues start coming in.

# NEXT STEPS AND QUESTIONS

This is a high level summary of the major themes that emerged in a quick survey. Overall, in our small farmer community there is a lot of uncertainty, as there is in all of society right now. The additional challenge for farmers is the timing of the farm season and the need to look ahead. We fully believe that having a local, resilient food system is more important now than ever before, and will do everything in our power to help make that happen.

What is becoming more clear daily is that the world will never go back to the way it was before COVID-19. It is a time for us all to think hard about what is truly important and what we will prioritize now and in the future. Federal and provincial governments, and non-profits are taking quick action to support farmers and small business owners daily, including getting farmers markets designated as essential services, developing online sales channels for farmers market members, and developing zero interest loan programs and grant programs which will respond to many of the concerns outlined above.

At the same time, it is essential that we look ahead. How do we create a resilient, local food system where producers and eaters can easily withstand disturbance and change? Answering this question will take collaborative efforts. One respondent said "This pandemic underlines the need for regional food sufficiency. That is, increasing a region's ability to grow its own food. Now is the obvious time to advocate that the government, for the first time in memory, directly provide financial support (especially infrastructure) for small to medium size farms. This is where our food needs to come from and we are lucky at this point these farmers have all not quit already. We can use this difficult situation as an opportunity to get infrastructure (eg greenhouses, ponds, machinery) in place so they can produce more." Another said, "I'm planting the same amount of food, if not more. I just hope people will be able to buy it. I need local government to be able to help folks buy fresh local food."

### In the short term, at FFCF, we plan to:

- Share the results of this survey as widely as feasible and appropriate, letting governments, partner organizations, media, and eaters know that BC farmers both need our help, and are here to help us all stay nourished
- Build on our popular listing of CSA programs, both inviting farmers to register and directing eaters to it. www.farmfolkcityfolk.ca/knowledge-pantry/csa
- Build and amplify powerful buy local messaging

### New projects we are exploring:

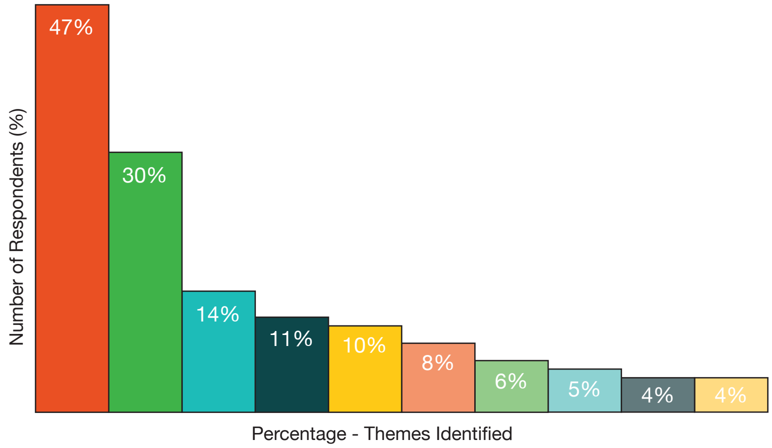
- Developing a subsidy program for low-income eaters to access local food via CSAs, which would both create secure demand for local products for farmers to have the confidence to increase their production in the spring planting season, and support folks who may be facing lower incomes in accessing local food
- Creating a series of webinars to train farmers to move to online sales platforms and connect them with eaters
- Other creative and safe direct to consumer sales channels for small farmers

We are ready to do everything we can to help farmers and eaters thrive during this time, and believe that a collaborative approach is absolutely necessary. We are available for further discussion at any time.

For more information or to discuss collaborative next steps, please contact Anita Georgy, FarmFolk CityFolk Executive Director at director@farmfolkcityfolk.ca.

## Q. 1 How is your Farm Business being impacted right now?

| | Themes | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| | **Lack/Loss of Sales/Revenue** | **47%** |
| | **Uncertainty (Various)** | **30%** |
| | **Lack/Loss of Labour** | **14%** |
| | Mild Impact/None | 11% |
| | Increased Sales/Demand | 10% |
| | Lack of Supply Access | 8% |
| | Travel Restrictions | 6% |
| | Sanitation/Safety | 5% |
| | New Sales Strategies | 4% |
| | Severely Impacted | 4% |




### Further breakdown of the top ranked theme

| A. Lack/Loss of Sales/Revenue | Count | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Closed Restaurants/Hospitality | 17 | 18% |
| Market closure | 11 | 11% |
| Event cancellation | 9 | 9% |
| Seeds/Seedlings | 8 | 8% |
| Wholesale | 4 | 4% |
| Loss of Visitors | 3 | 3% |
| Onsite | 2 | 2% |
| Commercial | 1 | 1% |
| Tourism | 1 | 1% |
| Total (Unique Responses) | 45 | 47% |

| B. Uncertainty (Various) | Count | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Market closure | 14 | 15% |
| Sales | 9 | 9% |
| Unspecified (General) | 5 | 5% |
| Labour | 4 | 4% |
| Production | 4 | 4% |
| Supplies | 1 | 1% |
| Total (Unique Responses) | 29 | 30% |

| C. Lack/Loss of Labour | Count | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Lack/loss of labour | 11 | 11% |
| Lack/loss of volunteers | 2 | 2% |
| Total (Unique Responses) | 13 | 14% |

### REPORTING METHODOLOGY

As the questions were open-ended, farmers had the opportunity to provide unique responses to the survey, meaning the data generated was all qualitative in nature. A research assistant at ISFS, using a coding software known as Atlas.ti, identified unique themes for each response, to generate a quantitative analysis of the survey.

Each response was reviewed and tagged with multiple sub- and higher-order themes to reflect the way in which farmers were being impacted by the crisis. Sub-themes such as ‘Closed Restaurants’ and ‘Market closure’, reflect a more detailed breakdown of a response, while higher-order themes, such as ‘Lack or Loss of Sales/Revenue’, highlight connections between sub-themes, and the way in which farmers are being impacted and need support more broadly. Sub-themes can be found within tables that have been grouped around a higher-order theme.

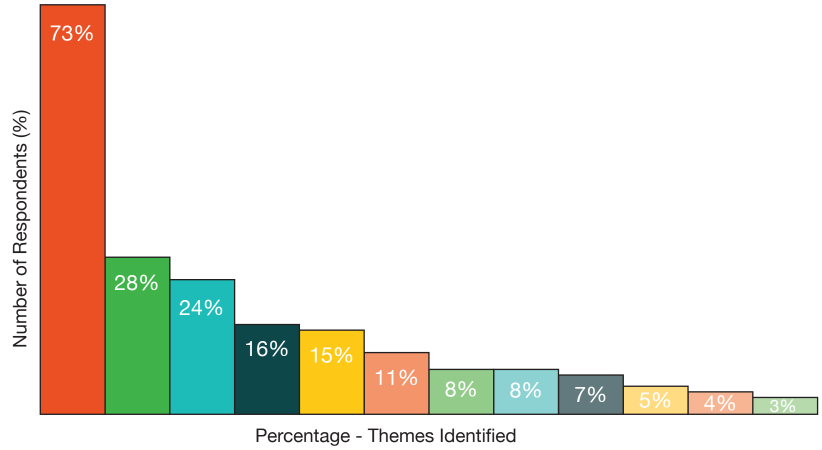
Due to the fact that responses were open-ended, most farmers identified multiple ways in which they were being impacted, or needed support, meaning that there were often multiple sub-themes that fell under a higher-order theme within a response. For this reason, the tally at the bottom of each table is an aggregate of the total number of respondents that mentioned something related to a higher-order theme, such as ‘Lack or Loss of Sales/Revenue’, rather than a tally of the total number of sub-themes mentioned. This provides a more accurate representation of the total number of responses related to a particular higher-order theme, rather than the total number of sub-themes related to that higher-order theme identified overall.

The graphs depict all the higher-order themes that were identified in the survey responses and the total percentage of respondents that identified each higher-order theme in particular.

This data has been coded by a Research Assistant at the KPU Institute for Sustainable Food Systems

## Q. 2 What impacts do you anticipate this year?

| | Themes | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| | Lack/Loss of Sales/Revenue | 73% |
| | Loss of Labor | 28% |
| | Adapting Sales Strategy | 24% |
| | Increased Demand/Sales/Labor | 16% |
| | Access to supplies/seeds/feed | 15% |
| | Harvest/Production Related | 11% |
| | Illness/Sanitation | 8% |
| | Uncertain | 8% |
| | Financial/Operational Closure/Collapse | 7% |
| | Issues Delivering | 5% |
| | Public perception - Fear | 4% |
| | No Impact | 3% |




### Further breakdown of the top ranked theme

| A. Lack/Loss of Sales/Revenue | Count | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Lack/loss of Sales/Revenue/Income | 38 | 40% |
| Market Closure/Sales | 28 | 29% |
| Restaurant Closures/Sales | 7 | 7% |
| Other | 6 | 6% |
| Events cancelled | 3 | 3% |
| Future investements/upgrades | 3 | 3% |
| Loss of visitors | 3 | 3% |
| Cash Flow | 2 | 2% |
| Loss of wholesale | 2 | 2% |
| Lower prices/Rate of Return | 2 | 2% |
| Challenges - Paying bills/loans | 2 | 2% |
| Total (Unique Responses) | 70 | 73% |

Other including: Increased Costs, Cancelled workshops, Tourism, Loss of harvest, Tours, Supporting family

| B. Loss of Labor | Count | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Loss of Volunteers/Labor | 19 | 20% |
| Providing work/Layoffs | 7 | 7% |
| More work | 3 | 3% |
| Unpaid labor | 1 | 1% |
| Total (Unique Responses) | 27 | 28% |

| C. Adapting Sales Strategy | Count | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| How to sell produce/find buyers | 17 | 18% |
| Delivery | 2 | 2% |
| Sales outlets | 4 | 4% |
| Increase CSA | 1 | 1% |
| Online-sales | 1 | 1% |
| Total (Unique Responses) | 23 | 24% |

**REPORTING METHODOLOGY**

Please see Page 6

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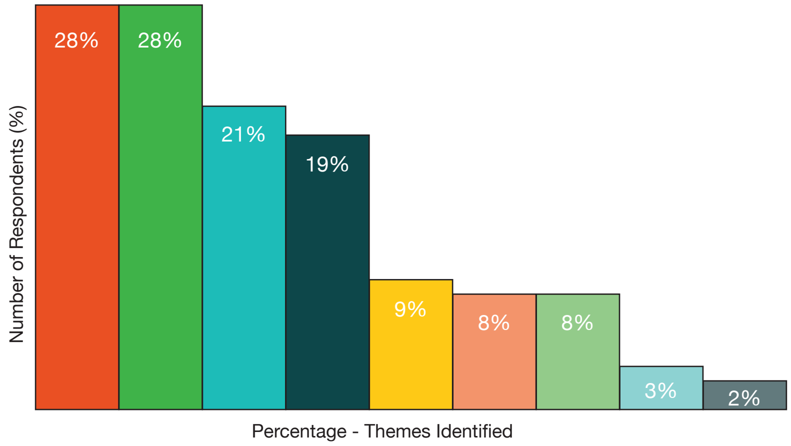
## Q. 3 What support do you need right now?

| | Themes | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| | Financial Support | 28% |
| | Communication/Marketing Support | 28% |
| | No Immediate Support | 21% |
| | Providing More Information Resources | 19% |
| | Sales | 9% |
| | Labor Related | 8% |
| | Access to supplies | 8% |
| | Emotional/Mental | 3% |
| | Designate Farms as Essential Services | 2% |




### Further breakdown of the top ranked theme

| A. Financial Support | Count | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Income support | 15 | 16% |
| Mortgage/rent deferment/cancellation | 5 | 5% |
| Access to credit/lower interest rate | 4 | 4% |
| Materials | 2 | 2% |
| Low-income subsidy (CSA - Farmbox) | 3 | 3% |
| Wage subsidy | 2 | 2% |
| Infrastructure | 1 | 1% |
| Taxes/farm status | 1 | 1% |
| Health coverage | 1 | 1% |
| Total (Unique Responses) | 27 | 28% |

| B. Communication/Marketing Support | Count | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Online sales/services Support | 11 | 11% |
| Local Food | 6 | 6% |
| CSA Program | 5 | 5% |
| Increasing clientele | 4 | 4% |
| Public support/awareness | 4 | 4% |
| Farmer communication forum/platform | 2 | 2% |
| Total (Unique Responses) | 27 | 28% |

| C. No Immediate Support | Count | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| None | 8 | 8% |
| Not yet | 7 | 7% |
| Unsure | 5 | 5% |
| Total (Unique Responses) | 20 | 21% |

**REPORTING METHODOLOGY**

Please see Page 6

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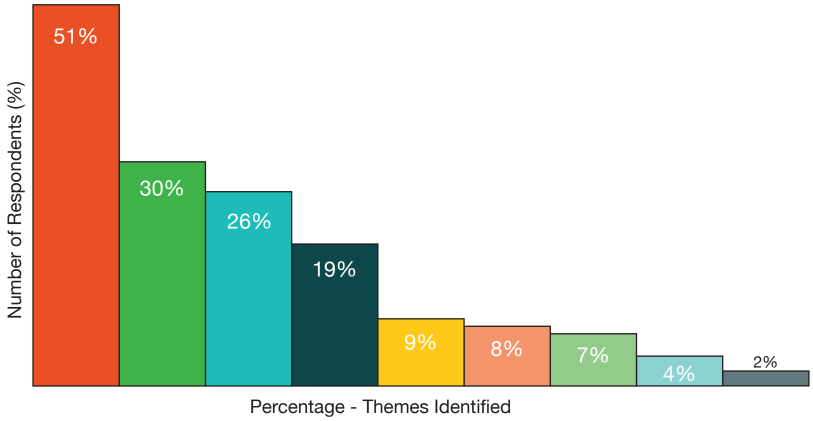
## Q. 4 What support do you anticipate needing this year?

| | Themes | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| | Financial | 51% |
| | Accessing/Finding Markets/Sales outlets | 30% |
| | Marketing/Communication | 26% |
| | Uncertain | 19% |
| | Information | 9% |
| | Access to Supplies/Services/Inputs | 8% |
| | Labor access/support | 7% |
| | None | 4% |
| | Mental Health support | 2% |




### Further breakdown of the top ranked theme

| A. Financial | Count | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Income support | 36 | 38% |
| Income Support - Labor | 7 | 7% |
| Interest Free/Credit Support | 4 | 4% |
| Income support - Infrastructure/facilities | 3 | 3% |
| Income support - Health coverage | 1 | 1% |
| Income support - Lease payments | 1 | 1% |
| Total (Unique Responses) | 49 | 51% |

| B. Accessing/Finding Markets/Sales outlets | Count | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Accessing new markets/sales outlets/clientele | 18 | 19% |
| Online setup/support | 8 | 8% |
| Current Farmers Markets | 6 | 6% |
| Distribution | 3 | 3% |
| Processing | 2 | 2% |
| Restaurants | 1 | 1% |
| Total (Unique Responses) | 29 | 30% |

| C. Marketing/Communication | Count | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Public education - Local food | 16 | 16% |
| Online setup/support | 8 | 8% |
| Marketing/Communication - CSA/Farmgate | 4 | 4% |
| Total (Unique Responses) | 25 | 26% |

**REPORTING METHODOLOGY**

Please see Page 6

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