



# PASS REPORT

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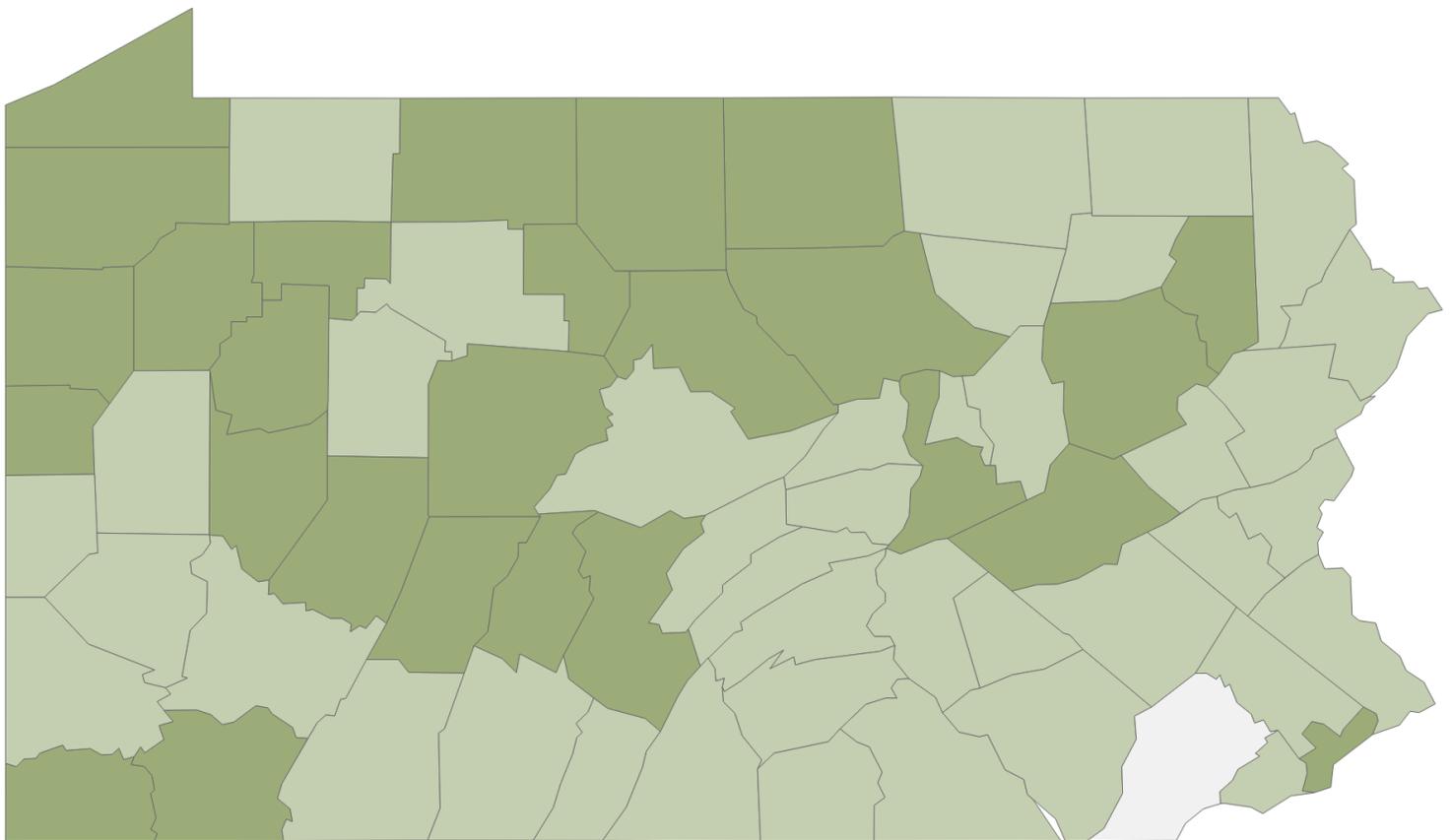
**FEEDING**  
PENNSYLVANIA

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## A SYNOPSIS OF THE PENNSYLVANIA AGRICULTURE SURPLUS SYSTEM (PASS) REVIEW

**“Making the Best Better” - 4H Motto**

Feeding Pennsylvania is a partner state association of Feeding America, the nationwide network of food banks. Feeding America recently updated the analysis of food insecurity rates by projecting an additional 13.2 million Americans will be at risk due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This means a total of 50.4 million or 15.6% of the American population is currently or in danger of going hungry. Further, Feeding America foresees food insecurity rates in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania rising from 10.9% to 15.4%.



After the onset of the pandemic, the United States Congress acted quickly to provide relief to those in need. As a result, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) infused money into the food industry to offset market disruptions. One beneficiary was the Farmers to Families Food Box Program which utilizes local contractors to procure meats, dairy products, and produce in ready-to-share packaging for food banks and pantries. As of November 30, 2020, USDA states that 122.9 million of these boxes will be distributed between May 15 and December 31.



Pennsylvania budgets \$1.5M annually to support the Pennsylvania Agriculture Surplus System (PASS) which works to connect Pennsylvania's agricultural sector with those in need by supporting donations of food products while being reimbursed for the costs involved in harvesting, processing, packaging, and transportation. The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture (PDA) projects that **PASS has contributed over 13 million pounds of food** to the food insecure since the program was first funded in 2015. An additional \$10M of Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding was authorized by Governor Tom Wolf to expand the scope of work of the PASS program this year. Feeding Pennsylvania became the statewide contractor for the PASS program in June of 2020 and hired Tom Mainzer as their Director of Agricultural Partnerships to manage the program.

PASS vendors were recently surveyed to provide not only demographic information but also insight into how the pandemic has affected their businesses and what changes might enhance their participation. Ninety one of the 138 vendors were sent surveys via email. The remaining 47 either do not utilize electronic communication or were passively involved such as having product purchased from their venue for use by PASS.

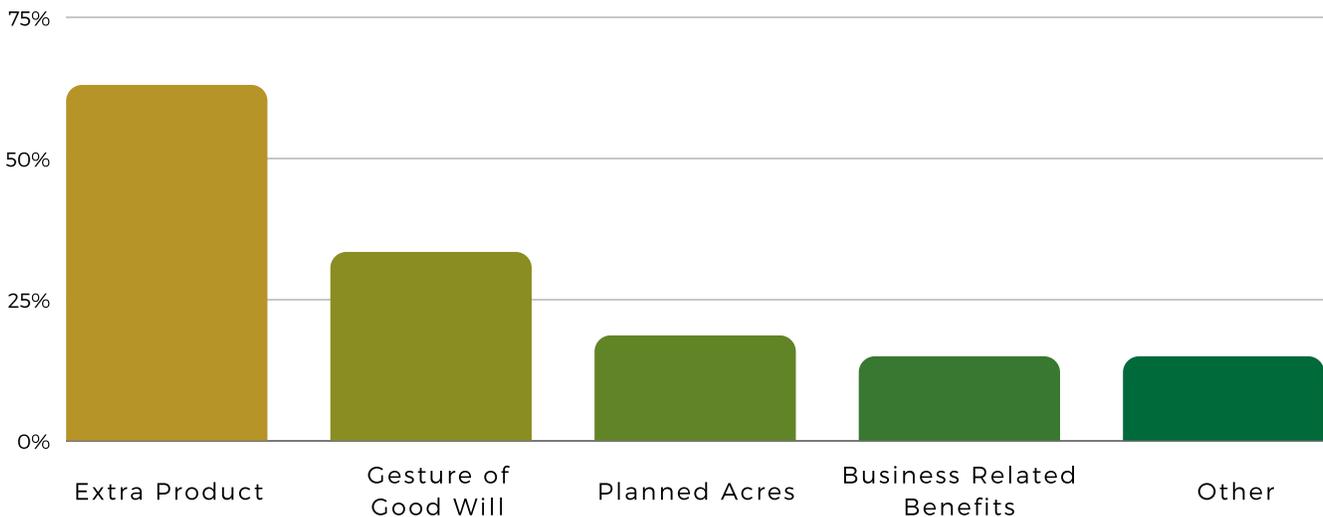
## THE NUMBERS

## OUR STATISTICS

When asked which category best describes their operation, participant responses were fairly evenly divided among first generation farmer (11.11%), second or higher generation farmer (18.52%), Multi-generational farming partnership (18.52%), grocery store (0), packaging/food distribution (29.63%), other (22.22%). Eighty five percent of the respondents have been in business for more than 25 years while a vast majority (81.48%) knew they were involved in the PASS program.

Fruit/vegetable production (59.26%) followed by dairy production (18.52%) best describe the participants' industries. The top-ranking reason for involvement was extra product (62.96%) with one third (33.3%) saying they wanted to participate as a gesture of goodwill. On a scale of one (worst) to five (best), participants rated the overall experience with PASS an average of 3.95. Most would participate again with an aggregate rating of 4.35 (one being won't and five being a definitely will). On a scale of one being extremely negative and five extremely positive, when asked how COVID-19 impacted their businesses, the response average was 2.5. Additionally, respondents related that processing capabilities (22.22%) and communications with restaurants and reduced operations of restaurants (29.63%) were the pandemic's primary negative effects on their operations.

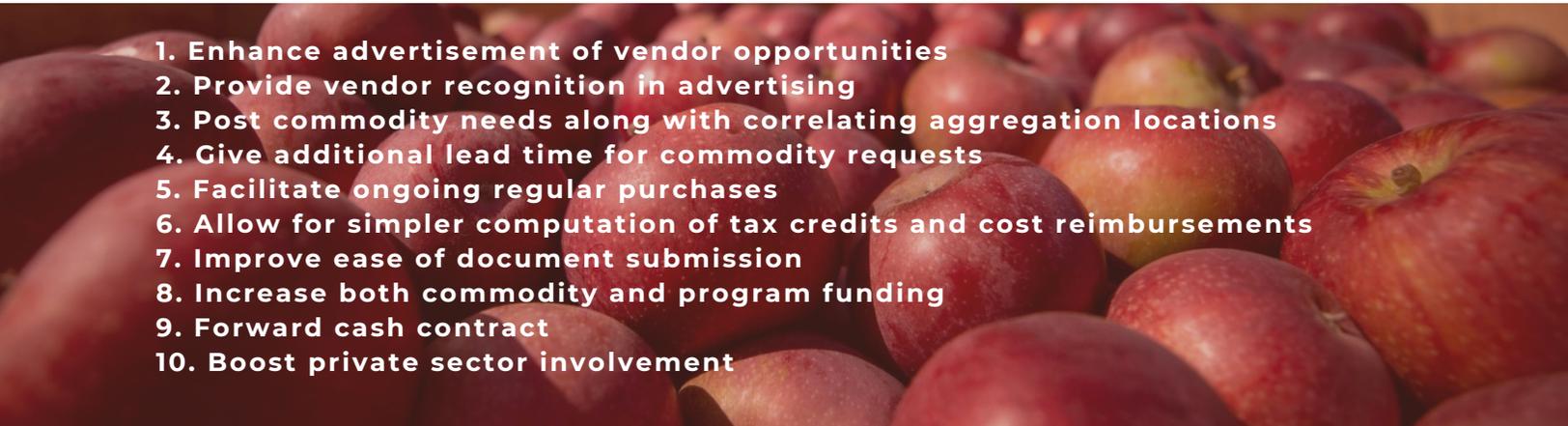
### WHY DID YOU PARTICIPATE IN THE PASS PROGRAM?



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In addition to the above survey, a smaller focus group of individuals representing a cross section of agricultural interests involved with PASS met via Zoom with the purpose of pulling more nuanced reactions to questions similar to those posed in the survey.

Both the respondents to the survey and the focus group participants suggested steps PASS could implement to improve the program and make it more valuable to vendors. A synopsis of these action items follows:

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- A close-up photograph of several bright red apples with some yellow-green highlights, filling the background of the list.
- 1. Enhance advertisement of vendor opportunities**
  - 2. Provide vendor recognition in advertising**
  - 3. Post commodity needs along with correlating aggregation locations**
  - 4. Give additional lead time for commodity requests**
  - 5. Facilitate ongoing regular purchases**
  - 6. Allow for simpler computation of tax credits and cost reimbursements**
  - 7. Improve ease of document submission**
  - 8. Increase both commodity and program funding**
  - 9. Forward cash contract**
  - 10. Boost private sector involvement**

Note that some participants stated the program was good and no improvements were needed. Tom Mainzer's communication style and engagement of vendors was complemented. A full listing of responses can be requested.

In sum, the PASS program benefits both Pennsylvania's food industry and the food insecure. However, several steps could be taken to, as the 4H motto states, "Make the Best Better." Many of the suggestions can be quickly instituted to improve PASS's efficiency and effectiveness in serving vendors and those in need.

Looking forward, a comprehensive questionnaire has been issued to the larger agricultural/food industry, including entities not currently participating in PASS, to further define means of increasing and enhancing PASS involvement. The above-mentioned focus group will be asked to reconvene on a regular basis to provide ongoing input. The results of these endeavors along with PASS implementation of the above and future suggestions will be shared to all respondents, PASS participants, funders, and others with interests in the program.