



## THE COMMON MARKET'S FARM-FRESH BOX PROGRAM

# Helping municipalities prioritize high-quality, equitable food relief during a global pandemic

### MEETING CRITICAL NEED

In response to COVID-19, The Common Market partnered with city government agencies across three major metropolitan areas—**Baltimore, MD; New York City, NY; and Atlanta, GA**—to help them meet the emergent food access needs of their most vulnerable constituents.

The partnerships brought to life **an innovative approach to food relief: hand-packed, individualized boxes of farm-fresh ingredients, all sourced from sustainable family farms.** The emphasis on high-quality, fresh offerings created much needed **business for regional farmers** and producers, while demonstrating an **environmentally conscious approach to food relief.**

The contracts demonstrate how local governments can partner with nonprofits and mission-oriented vendors to address constituent needs in times of crisis, and inspire ideal conditions and considerations for long-term food system changes.

### The Farm-Fresh Box Program – City Partners

#### BY THE NUMBERS



In Baltimore, New York & Atlanta  
(May 2020 - March 2021)

2.8<sup>+</sup> million

meal  
equivalents  
distributed



287,264

families  
reached



# About The Common Market

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## COMMUNITY FOOD RESILIENCE

The Common Market is a nonprofit regional food distributor with a mission to connect communities with good food from sustainable family farms. Our food hub serves communities throughout the Mid-Atlantic, Southeast and Texas regions by providing access to fresh, healthy foods from small to mid-scale family farms and producers.

The Common Market offers an alternative pathway to food security, based on shorter value chains, direct distribution and closer relationships between farmers and the people they feed. More than a vendor, we help bring equity to the food system, giving municipalities and the residents they serve a chance to fight food insecurity by building community food resiliency.

## WHY OUR MODEL WORKS

- Access to a network of sustainable family farms
- Safe, short supply chain
- Fresh, culturally appropriate foods
- Conveniently packed, family-sized boxes
- Direct and routine delivery

[www.thecommonmarket.org](http://www.thecommonmarket.org)



*BDA Farms, Uniontown, AL*

***“Municipal relief programs can help break a cycle that nutrient-dense, high quality food has to travel farther than needed to feed people.”***

*-Kyle Platt, Farm Manager,  
BDA Farms, Uniontown, AL, egg supplier*

# A different kind of food relief.

## THE PROBLEM

U.S. cities including Baltimore, New York and Atlanta were **called upon to address acute food access crises exacerbated by COVID-19 in a way that prioritized high-need, vulnerable populations through culturally appropriate offerings and safe distribution.**

In some early relief efforts, responses focused on shelf-stable foods. Over time, the need and demand for fresh and perishable products became evident.

## THE APPROACH

The Common Market's **Farm-Fresh Boxes** offered municipalities a unique food offering for their communities that included seasonal, nutritious items like tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, eggplants, apples, potatoes and more—providing individuals and families with a week's worth of fresh ingredients to incorporate into meals.

In each instance, The Common Market worked with representatives from each municipality to curate, pack, and distribute individual boxes that best met their community's food needs.



*“ I am in my 60s and live in Jackson Heights, in what is now the deadliest area of the Earth due to coronavirus. I remain healthy, but don't wish to walk outside and signed up for a free food delivery service operated by the City of New York. Yesterday your box came with fresh bread, dried beans, potatoes, a beet, kale, luscious, canned crushed tomatoes, and cheddar cheese. My first thought was that someone wants me to live and it almost brought tears to my eyes. Thank you so very much for helping me and I am glad we in New York can be an outlet for your farmers.”*

-Janice, NYC box recipient



## A CLOSER LOOK BALTIMORE, MD

**Organizing agency:** Baltimore City Department of Planning, Food Policy and Planning Division

**Funding:** FEMA reimbursement

**Audience served:** Baltimore residents, with targeted response in areas with high and growing concentrations of SNAP participation, among other factors

**Volume distributed:**

- ~1,645 boxes weekly, October 2020-March 2021
- 10,300 boxes weekly scheduled through June 2021

**Box details:** 7-8 produce items

**Distribution Method:** Baltimore partnered with 37 grass-roots, community-based distribution partners to serve as last mile logistic partners.

**Why The Common Market?** Our food access solutions were closely aligned with the City of Baltimore's [Sustainability Plan](#), which centers on addressing acute food insecurity across households and communities and supporting equitable food systems.

[Learn More.](#)

## TOTAL IMPACT

**39,433** boxes distributed

**26** local farms supported

**450,000+** pounds of local food purchased

**\$662,000+** paid to farmers / investment in local economy



*“Fruits and vegetables were the highest need we saw—and it wasn’t readily available or affordable. We heard what great, high-quality product you’d be able to distribute. That was really, really appreciated.”*

*-Holly Freishtat, Food Policy Director, Food Policy & Planning Division, Baltimore*

*“When community members are in the position to define what they need from the food system it builds power. And when institutions listen and respond to these needs, a more equitable system can be achieved.”*

*-City of Baltimore, The Sustainability Plan:  
Climate and Resilience: Food Systems*



## A CLOSER LOOK NEW YORK, NY

**Organizing agency/program:** NYC Department of Sanitation, GetFood NYC Emergency Relief

**Funding:** FEMA response and recovery COVID-19 relief assistance, NYC Office of Emergency Management

**Audience served:** Home-bound, and/or New Yorkers that faced acute food insecurity

**Volume distributed:** Upwards of 13,000 food boxes a week, April-October 2020

**Box details:** 5-6 produce items, plus freshly baked bread, cheese, and dry NY-harvested black beans

**Distribution Method:** Leveraged logistics capabilities and expertise of Department of Sanitation

NYC initiated a contract with Taxi and Limousine Coalition to deliver directly to low income housing units alongside larger distributions.

**Why The Common Market:** We are a smaller vendor with reliable, high-quality products.

[Learn More.](#)



### TOTAL IMPACT

**244,429** boxes distributed

**41** local farms supported

**2.8 million<sup>+</sup>** pounds of local food purchased

**\$3.55 million<sup>+</sup>** paid to farmers / investment in local economy



**“ We learned from our experience that sometimes smaller vendors had better quality. In the end, we tried to lean on vendors like The Common Market because that’s where we got all the positive feedback from residents.”**

*-Molly Brennan, Director, Department of Sanitation NYC*



A CLOSER LOOK  
**ATLANTA, GEORGIA**

**Organizing agency:**

The Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs – Welcoming Atlanta

**Funding:** Coronavirus Relief Fund, CARES Act

**Audience served:** Immigrant populations, primarily Latinx, open to all Atlanta residents

**Volume distributed:**

~100-200 boxes weekly, November 2020-January 2021

**Box details:** variations of 6-8 produce items, chicken, beef, eggs, organic 2% milk, rice, beans

**Distribution Method:** Various community-based distributions, powered by community volunteers

**Why The Common Market:** Our program addressed their pillars of priority: dignified, healthy offerings; ability to support immigrant- and BIPOC-owned business and organizations; offerings that had a limited carbon footprint.

[Learn More.](#)



**TOTAL IMPACT**

**3,000** boxes distributed

**15** local farms supported

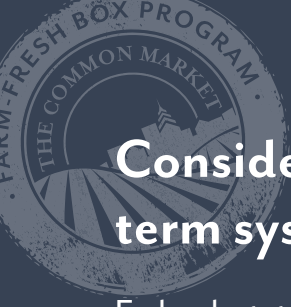
**120,000+** pounds of local food purchased

**\$162,438** paid to farmers / investment in local economy

**“[This program] was a really transformative opportunity to put money into immigrant and black-owned businesses from an equity standpoint.”**

-Michelle Maziar, Director, Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, City of Atlanta





## Considerations for long-term system change

Federal, state, and city procurement dollars can **catalyze the revival of sustainable, equitable local food systems**. In turn, values-aligned purchasing and vendor selection can begin to address the economic disparities impacting our city's most vulnerable, lessening hunger and poor nutrition across communities.

Three major approaches to systems changes that could drive transformative impact for urban and rural communities:

1. Create **financial incentives** for local and regional procurement.
2. Consider **values-based contract language** in public procurement opportunities.
3. Allow for **communities to define what they need** from the food system, let this inform policy.

Discuss creative partnership opportunities with us:  
[rachel@thecommonmarket.org](mailto:rachel@thecommonmarket.org).

## Recommendations for COVID-19 recovery and future emergency contracts

**Prioritize vendors who source from small, mid-sized, and regional producers when possible**

Ensuring that stimulus and emergency dollars, including funds made available through the American Rescue Plan, are spent within regional, place-based economies supports local job growth and stability, contributes to smaller carbon footprints, and builds necessary redundancy and resiliency across supply chains.

**Award more and smaller contracts**

Creating market access for local and regional growers requires reimagining contract minimums, enabling qualified suppliers at various levels of operational capacity to meaningfully participate and meet community needs.

**Center quality, cultural relevance, and nutrition in emergency feeding responses**

Offering fresh, nutrient-dense, and culturally appropriate foods is critical to an equitable emergency response effort, providing stability and dignity during a time of great uncertainty and loss.

**Embed food equity and access into disaster preparedness plans**

Food insecurity disproportionately affects low income communities of color, and those realities are compounded in moments of crisis. Understanding and prioritizing upstream resiliency planning to combat these food access challenges supports greater community representation and food sovereignty.

