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Maine to Use Pandemic CARES Act Funding to Support Farmers, Agriculture Producers who Invested in E-commerce

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AUGUSTA - The Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF) will use federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding to support farmers and agricultural producers impacted by COVID-19, DACF Commissioner Amanda Beal announced today.

"Adapting and meeting the challenges of market disruptions caused by COVID-19 prompted many farmers to invest in e-commerce solutions," **Beal said**. "I am pleased that we are able to allocate these funds to reimburse farmers and producers who innovated quickly during the pandemic to improve their websites and create online sales platforms to reach customers seeking Maine grown agricultural products."

This program, which will be administered by Coastal Enterprises, Inc. (CEI), is open to farm businesses that have incurred new, unanticipated expenses directly related to e-commerce infrastructure purchase or subscription after March 1, 2020. **The funding includes reimbursement of up to $5,000 for e-commerce infrastructure, including**:

- Comprehensive online sales management platforms (e.g., those that cover CSA, wholesale, and direct-to-consumer models);
- Online payment processing subscription/services;
- Turnkey or custom order processing and fulfillment software;
- Website design/customization services (e.g., subcontractor services);
- Critical program/app integration services (e.g., QuickBooks, Stripe).

"Increased access to more farm-direct products has been one of the bright spots during the pandemic," **added DACF Bureau of Agriculture Director Nancy McBrady**. "We are making sure the farm businesses that turned to online sales to safely make food available to their customers during COVID-19 are reimbursed."

Many agricultural producers have been forced to rapidly and radically shift their business practices to survive market loss due to COVID-19. Many have switched to or drastically upgraded their direct-to-consumer offerings. DACF is using CARES Act funding to provide the economic support needed by these producers to

transition from face-to-face transactions to online sales and order fulfillment through e-commerce infrastructure grants.

Complete **DACF CARES Act (CFDA# 21.019) E-Commerce Reimbursement Program** information is available on CEI's Maine Grant Programs webpage (//www.ceimaine.org/covid-19-resources-for-businesses/maine-covid-grants/) . The application deadline is December 18, 2020.

For questions or additional information, please contact Jenn Stein, CEI Food Systems Business Advisor at jenn.stein@ceimaine.org (mailto:jenn.stein@ceimaine.org) .

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