

## RESPONDING TO COVID-19

*Along with its massive human toll, COVID-19 delivered an unprecedented economic crisis and exposed weaknesses in our food and healthcare systems. As the pandemic unfolded in the US, the RRDCs quickly initiated several concurrent research projects aimed at developing policy-relevant insights to inform response and recovery efforts. Cooperative Extension Service on-the-ground efforts also showcase relevant insights.*



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### COVID-19 Issues and Data Briefs

Designed to provide information quickly or stimulate discussion, this series of briefs by the RRDC in the Northeast has studied the pandemic in the context of direct farm sales, the fruit and vegetable industry, consumer spending and sourcing, network science, and regional science. They are available online at: <https://bit.ly/2A4Qmbj>

### Local Food System Response to COVID-19

The RRDC in the Northeast is partnering with the University of Kentucky and Colorado State University in a one-year Cooperative Agreement with the United States Department of Agriculture, Agriculture Marketing Service, to research the impacts, adaptations and innovations of COVID-19 on U.S. Local and Regional Food Systems. This project focuses on rapid assessments of initial and ongoing COVID-19 responses in the food system across diverse market channels, products and populations. Project outputs will be released throughout the next year, including impact assessments, innovation briefs and webinars intended for research and practitioner audiences. <https://lfscovid.localfoodeconomics.com/>

### Mental Health Issues During COVID-19

The RRDC in the North Central region sponsored three webinars focused on building community resilience in the wake of COVID-19 by building the capacity for behavioral health in rural America, including addressing opioid addiction and the mental health of farm families during the pandemic.

### Rural Retail Resilience

[CREATE BRIDGES](#), currently being piloted in nine rural communities, explores how rural places can better support retail sector economies which often comprise a large portion of rural jobs. During the pandemic, the initiative guided the pilot sites into identifying and implementing rapid response strategies aimed at shoring up these businesses that were most at risk of failing.

### A Practical Guide to the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (the "CARES Act")

This guide, produced by Dorsey & Whitney LLP, was reproduced with permission by the RRDC in the West and University of California's Cooperative Extension and distributed throughout the nationwide cooperative extension system—an organization well-positioned to get information into communities that need it.

### Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN)

In 2020, the RRDCs collaborated with the EDEN, a national organization within Cooperative Extension Services charged with advancing timely information and services to residents affected by disasters, to conduct listening sessions in seven states across the nation. These sessions provided EDEN with valuable insights on the type of information and educational resources that communities state they need to better prepare for, reduce the impact of, and recover from disasters.



## RESPONDING TO COVID-19 (ctd.)

### Special issue of Choices Magazine: Rural Development Implications One Year After COVID-19

The Council on Food, Agricultural and Resource Economics (C-FARE) and the RRDCs are organizing a special issue for *Choices* to be published in 2021. The issue will offer research-based perspectives on broad range of topics including food systems, local food, food security, poverty and income, broadband, health, self-employment, agricultural production, labor, and others.

Accepted titles include:

- COVID-19 Prepared: Healthcare in Rural Communities and USDA Rural Development Community Facility Asset Analysis
- A General Picture of Broadband Progress in Rural America Prior to the COVID-19 Outbreak
- Lost and Found? Job Loss and Recovery in Rural America due to COVID-19
- Rural Employment Implications of COVID-19: Analysis and Predictions
- Exploring the Impacts of Increased Rural Trail Use During the COVID-19 Pandemic
- COVID-19 and Permanent Bank Branch Closures
- Child Care and Rural Development Implications One Year After COVID-19

### Twitter/Google Trends Analysis of Food Security Under COVID-19

With colleagues from Penn State's College of Information Sciences and Technology and Hamad Bin Khalifa University (Qatar), NERCRD secured seed-grant funding to examine how social media may predict food shortages or insecurity under COVID-19. Using Google Trends and Twitter data on searches and tweets related to food items, food supply, food shortage and insecurity, we are developing insights into local conditions related to the food system in different states (including rural areas of the nation). In turn, we will examine how these can be used to forecast shortages in real time in different parts of the country, as well as emerging problems, for example, with shortages at food banks. We will complement this with analysis of changing consumer sentiments over time in different communities, related to food availability and quality. We expect that our findings will reveal recommendations to facilitate interventions by governmental organizations, which could be rapidly deployed to address food shortages, and other related problems, should a similar scenario reoccur.



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Regional Rural Development Centers: [www.rrdc.info](http://www.rrdc.info)