

BY **RYAN MCCRIMMON**

Presented by the Almond Board of California

*With help from Helena Bottemiller Evich*

**Programming announcement:** *Our newsletters are evolving. Morning Agriculture will continue to publish daily for POLITICO Pro subscribers, but will publish once weekly for other readers starting on July 13. There will be no changes to the policy newsletters available to POLITICO Pro subscribers. To continue to receive Morning Agriculture daily, as well as access POLITICO Pro's full suite of policy tools and trackers, [get in touch about a Pro subscription](#). Already a Pro subscriber? [Learn more here](#).*

#### QUICK FIX

— **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program spending jumped to \$5 billion in March** as the pandemic began to shake the U.S. economy, according to new data released by USDA this week. Anti-hunger groups are renewing their calls for bumped up benefits and an extension of Pandemic EBT.

— **Senate Democrats are calling foul on four of the largest meatpackers** for exporting large amounts of pork, beef and other proteins to China while warning about a potential domestic meat shortage.

— **Lawmakers from top apple-growing states are asking the Agriculture Department** to send coronavirus relief payments to apple producers. The industry is one of several that were left out of USDA's \$16 billion direct aid package despite a sharp drop in crop prices.

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A message from the Almond Board of California:

Bees are essential to growing almonds. To support their health, the California almond community has funded 125 research projects, more

than any other crop group, and is working with Pollinator Partnership, the world's largest NGO focused on protecting pollinators, to encourage planting of bee pastures in California almond orchards. More at [Almonds.com/Bees](https://Almonds.com/Bees).

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**HAPPY WEDNESDAY, JUNE 24!** Welcome to Morning Ag, where [baseball is back \(probably\)](#), and your host thinks a 60-game season doesn't sound so bad. Send tips to [rmccrimmon@politico.com](mailto:rmccrimmon@politico.com) and [@ryanmccrimmon](#), and follow us [@Morning\\_Ag](#).

#### DRIVING THE DAY

**AFTER LONG DECLINE, SNAP ON THE RISE DUE TO COVID-19:** The number of people participating in SNAP went up in March and the cost of the program jumped by nearly 15 percent, to \$5.1 billion, new data shows.

The data, [recently posted online by USDA](#), provides the first national look at how the food safety net began to expand in the early days of the pandemic. Unlike other federal benefits such as unemployment insurance, SNAP data is not released in a timely fashion and is posted months after the fact.

**By the numbers:** The total number of people enrolled in the program in March was 37.3 million, a relatively small but significant increase from February when participation was 36.9 million. The average monthly benefit per person, however, jumped up substantially, from \$121 per person to \$137 per person as aid from Congress kicked in.

**Data lags the surge:** The numbers from USDA are behind in showing the real national picture. SNAP enrollment has gone up substantially in several states that have reported on a more regular basis. In Florida, for example, enrollment jumped more than 36 percent between February and May. In Texas, it went up nearly 19 percent, according to

preliminary data aggregated by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

**More calls for SNAP bump:** Feeding America, which represents a large network of major food banks, is hosting a virtual fly-in this week with 99 food banks from 42 states and D.C. to press for a 15 percent increase in benefits until employment levels rebound. The latest PR push uses the hashtag #ShortenTheLines on Twitter, a reference to the unprecedented number of people waiting in line at food distribution events.

**Food lines to fuel advocacy:** The group is out with [a new video today](#) urging people to ask Congress to not just support food banks but also SNAP.

**Calls to extend Pandemic EBT:** Anti-hunger groups are also pushing Congress to extend the Pandemic EBT program, which gives families with schoolchildren a one-time benefit payment to make up for lost free or subsidized meals at schools. They want the program extended through summer to replace summer meals programs with the possibility of extending into the next school year, if needed.

**“There is an urgency to not letting this program lapse** and having kids go hungry in the meantime,” said Lisa Davis, senior vice president of the No Kid Hungry Campaign, during a webinar on Tuesday.

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**GO BEYOND OUR BORDERS FROM YOUR HOME:** The coronavirus pandemic continues to devastate parts of the world, and a vaccine remains out of reach. Our Global Translations newsletter, presented by Bank of America, focuses on impactful global news, trends and decisions layered with critical contextual analysis from the world’s sharpest minds. From how the world is reckoning with systemic racism to how different countries are combating the latest

Covid-19 spikes, Global Translations offers a unique perspective that you won't find anywhere else. [SUBSCRIBE HERE.](#)

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### **SENATORS GRILL MEATPACKERS OVER EXPORTS TO**

**CHINA:** [Elizabeth Warren](#) (D-Mass.) and [Cory Booker](#) (D-N.J.) [sent a letter to Tyson Foods, JBS, Cargill and Smithfield Foods this week](#) with a list of questions about their actions during the pandemic — especially how they could export “massive amounts of pork and other meats to consumers in China” while warning that the U.S. meat supply chain was breaking.

**The senators suggested that the high volume of meat exports in April**, when many slaughterhouses were shutting down because of coronavirus outbreaks among their workers, flies in the face of concerns about a potential meat shortage — as well as the sharp rise in retail meat prices at U.S. grocery stores.

**Big picture:** It's the latest case of blowback against large companies that dominate the highly concentrated meat industry. The sector has faced growing scrutiny because of the outbreaks at processing plants and a string of antitrust actions against major meatpackers. [More here from the New York Times.](#)

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### **JOIN TODAY 1 p.m. EDT - THE SPEED OF SCIENCE POST-**

**COVID-19:** What does the future of science in a post-Covid-19 world look like? What lessons can we learn to accelerate medical research outside of the coronavirus? How can newly developed drugs and vaccines be distributed equitably? What can we do to minimize misinformation from flawed or inaccurate scientific studies published during a public health emergency? Join Patrick Steel, CEO of POLITICO, and Alexander Hardy, CEO of Genentech, for this critical and timely discussion. [REGISTER HERE.](#)

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## **APPLE, POTATO GROWERS WANT ACCESS TO FARM**

**AID:** USDA has already distributed a quarter of its \$16 billion in farm rescue payments since late May, but several ag sectors are still appealing to be included in the program. Apple growers last week submitted nearly 30 pages of data to the department laying out their economic case for a cut of the aid, and apple-state lawmakers are now throwing their weight behind the effort.

Twenty-five lawmakers led by House Ag member [Anthony Brindisi](#) (D-N.Y.), Reps. [Elise Stefanik](#) (R-N.Y.) and [Dan Newhouse](#) (R-Wash.) sent Secretary Sonny Perdue a letter arguing that the coronavirus “has had a drastic and damaging effect on apple growers,” like countless other industries.

**“These producers are often the backbones of rural communities,”** the members wrote. They said there are some 5,000 commercial apple growers in the U.S. and they generate \$15 billion in economic activity, including packing, shipping and processing.

They also cited industry data showing that apple prices have declined since the beginning of the year by as much as 24.9 percent, while shipping volumes have dropped by roughly the same percentage. The price loss is well above USDA’s threshold of 5 percent to qualify for stimulus payments, they added.

**The National Potato Council** this week also asked the department for more access to the agricultural aid, claiming that growers can’t receive “meaningful relief from the program” because of how it’s designed.

For example, the group claimed that USDA focused on retail sales when assessing the pandemic’s effect on the potato market, which didn’t account for the more severe impact on sales through restaurants and other foodservice businesses. [Read the NPC letter here.](#)

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## ROW CROPS

— **The Environmental Working Group published a report showing that nitrate pollution from farm runoff is worsening** across thousands of community water systems that serve nearly 21 million people. [The analysis out today](#) includes data from major farm states like California, Iowa, Nebraska and Texas.

— **President Donald Trump could slap tariffs on Canadian aluminum this week, reigniting trade tensions with Ottawa** and likely provoking retaliation just days before the USMCA pact goes into effect, [Pro Trade's Sabrina Rodriguez reports](#).

— **The pandemic has caused volatile moves in the cheese market, with cheddar prices soaring to record highs** after plummeting to nearly 20-year lows just weeks earlier. [The New York Times has the story](#).

— **A cyclospora outbreak tied to bagged salad has sickened at least 122 people in seven states**, [the CDC announced on Tuesday](#). Greens sold at Hy-Vee, Jewel-Osco and ALDI have been recalled across several Midwestern states.

— **USDA contractors have distributed more than 20 million boxes** of meat, dairy, fruit and vegetables to food banks through the department's \$3 billion commodity purchase program.

— **Kellee James, CEO of organic market research firm Mercaris, is joining the Organic Trade Association's board**. Mercaris also received an organic handler's certificate from Quality Assurance International, [the group announced](#).

Recognizing its role as a leader in California agriculture and global almond production, the California almond community is working to grow almonds in better, safer and healthier ways, protecting our communities and the environment. With targets across zero waste, water efficiency, pest management and air quality, the Almond Orchard 2025 Goals build off decades of previous achievements and represent the almond community's public commitment to continuous improvement. The Almond Board of California supports this effort by funding essential scientific research, programs and farmer outreach. Learn more about the California almond community and our commitment to continuous improvement at [Almonds.com/2025Goals](https://Almonds.com/2025Goals).