For Immediate Release:

Local Food Hub Supports Family Farms and Local Food Access During COVID-19

March 25, 2020 | Charlottesville, Virginia: Local Food Hub is taking measures to ensure that family farmers in Virginia stay afloat during the COVID-19 pandemic, and that emergency feeding efforts in Charlottesville include fresh, healthy products. Of particular note is Local Food Hub’s drive-through market on March 25, 4:00 - 5:30 p.m.

Local Food Hub is holding a drive-through, preorder-only market with 5 vendors: Bellair Farm, Caromont Farm, Little Hat Creek Farm, Radical Roots, and The Pie Chest. To date, the market has done over $6,500 in sales with 120 participants. The market will be held at Rivanna River Company. Attendees purchase food from local vendors in advance, and pick up the orders without leaving their cars and while maintaining strict social distancing. Local Food Hub anticipates that this will be the first of a series of safe market alternatives.

“The COVID-19 pandemic presents urgent challenges for our food system,” says Kristen Suokko, Executive Director of Local Food Hub. “Our staff is working hard to develop creative solutions such as these drive-through markets, and is pivoting other programming to mitigate impacts of the crisis on the neediest in our community.”

Local producers are in a moment of extreme uncertainty and vulnerability, as many of the buyers they rely on, such as universities, K12 schools, and restaurants, have shut their doors or are trimming their operations. Farms operate on razor-thin financial margins, and this social and economic crisis is going to have significant impacts on their businesses.

With school and business closures, children, the elderly, and others are dependent on emergency feeding efforts, which largely consist of highly-processed and shelf-stable options, despite the fact that fresh food is critical to the health of our vulnerable communities.

The global supply chain is also showing signs of strain, as increasingly empty shelves indicate. As COVID-19 spreads, food brought in from other regions may become harder to access.

The good news is that local and regional food systems – Local Food Hub’s specialty – are agile, resilient, and responsive. Ours is still functioning and flowing. Local Food Hub knows how to harness these community assets to create solutions in this time of crisis.

Specifically, Local Food Hub is:

- Purchasing food or subsidizing the purchasing of food from Local Food Hub partner farms for emergency feeding efforts, including the adaptation of the Fresh Farmacy: Fruit and Veggie Prescription Program
- Creating diverse markets for farms, including direct relationships with buyers and alternative farmers markets
• Coordinating with community organizations, such as the Charlottesville Food Justice Network, in their efforts to feed those in need
• Collaborating with larger regional efforts, such as the Mid-Atlantic Food Resilience and Access Coalition

In one example of this work in action, last week Local Food Hub collaborated with 4P Foods, the Charlottesville Food Justice Network, Albemarle Baking Company, and Loaves and Fishes to ensure that 100 patrons of The Haven received sandwiches, snacks, and fruit -- much of which was sourced from Virginia family farms.

To donate to Local Food Hub’s effort, please visit www.localfoodhub.org/covid/.

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About Local Food Hub: Local Food Hub seeks to transform how we value, grow, and eat food. It does this by working at the intersections of small-scale farming, the marketplace, the community, and good food policy. Its services include technical assistance and training for farmers, identifying new markets, promoting hub to hub collaboration, and programs to get more fresh, local food into schools, hospitals and health clinics. Local Food Hub partners with more than 75 small-scale farmers and producers throughout Virginia.