

COVID-19 PANDEMIC OUTBREAK:  
OVERVIEW OF THE IMPACT  
ON THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

A TECHNICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE UNDERGOING SITUATION

# #Farmers Never GiveUp

**Nature  
Never Stops**



**and Neither  
Do We**

*Last Updated 8th May 2020*

## 1. ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF COVID 19 ON FARMERS AND FARMING ACTIVITIES

### DISRUPTION IN AGRICULTURAL VALUE CHAINS

The pandemic outbreak of coronavirus has an impact on the entire food supply chain, confirming in the most terrible way that we are all part of a food system that is interconnected and fragile and that solutions must be developed together.

Farming has been recognized almost worldwide as an essential activity and farmers were asked to keep on working, even harder, to cope up with this new challenge. Nevertheless, each component of the food supply chain has an impact on farming activities, so each bottle neck occurring somewhere on the food supply chain, is having an impact on farmers.

Countries lock-down and borders' closure are strongly impacting farmers' access to input like seeds, fertilizers and agrochemicals.

For example, **Uganda National Farmers' Federation, UNFFE**, is witnessing constraints among their farmers' members in getting seeds and seeds advisory services due to the closure of the borders<sup>1</sup>.

These same concerns affect the processors.

Food distributors and wholesalers in the middle of the supply chain, meanwhile, are trying to perform logistical shifts, redirecting truckloads of food from shuttered businesses toward places where people now crave it — mainly grocery stores.

Closure of shops, restaurants, schools have notably reduced the market space for agricultural products with great impact on the sector.

Farmers' representatives have lamented worldwide the bad consequences of the lockdown on the farming sector. Farmers are struggling with less demand for their products.

As an example, the **Norwegian Farmers' Union** reports that Farmers producing local and high-end products for restaurants are struggling. Through the market regulation system, they can still deliver meat and dairy products, but to a much lower price. Farmers producing services and activities connected to the farm, like green care and tourism, are also struggling. The COVID-19 pandemic has eliminated all tourism in the entire country. That has severe economic consequences for the farming sector<sup>2</sup>.

Restrictions on travel and people movement as well are impacting consumers' demand with the same effect. Some agricultural compartments are already roughly affected by this challenging framework.

In many countries, farmers are not in the condition of transporting products to market because of the lockdown and they have suddenly found themselves in desperate conditions.

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<sup>1</sup> More information about the Ugandan situation is available here: <https://www.wfo-oma.org/covid-19/farmers-challenges/form-a-national-food-nutrition-security-task-force-to-avert-the-effects-covid-19-pandemic-in-uganda/>

<sup>2</sup> More information about the Norwegian situation is available here: <https://www.wfo-oma.org/covid-19/farmers-challenges/norwegian-farmers-tackle-covid-19-impacts/>

For instance, the **Cambodian Farmer Federation Association of Agriculture Producers (CFAP)** clearly outlined that Farmers are facing several challenges in selling their products as they have no collectors who come to pick their products from farms. It is difficult in developing countries like Cambodia to bring products to markets as most of the farmers' organisations, and farmers do not have their transportation means<sup>3</sup>.

In some cases, farmers have built online buying systems and are organizing themselves with home delivery to consumers, which represents an opportunity but has a high impact on the margins, which are in some cases very low, already. Also, it is worth mentioning that this is even harder in case of poor internet connection, which is something else national strategies should work on in times of lockdown and social distancing.

As examples, in many Countries, farmers are using virtual platforms to sell their products directly to through already existing digital tools<sup>4</sup>, or through some platforms or other solutions that have been created during the pandemic outbreak, to help farmers cope up with social distancing measures. For example, in **Nepal, Nepal Agriculture Cooperative Central Federation Limited (NACCFL)**<sup>5</sup>, an umbrella organization of agricultural cooperatives, has been involved in the marketing of vegetables produced in the rural areas. Before this pandemic, NACCFL had three outlets which were selling only the non-perishable products (pulses, cereals, different flour, honey, butter, fruits etc...). Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, NACCFL has also initiated to market the vegetables. With the support of its member organizations, NACCFL has been selling fresh vegetable from 11 places of Kathmandu valley. Under the slogan "rural products in urban areas", NACCFL is working in the front line to market the vegetables, according to three procedural steps:

- Collection of demand from customers through email, direct call.
- Packaging as agro-produces as per the demand
- Home Delivery of agro-produces

Because of all the challenges they are facing, like other economic actors, farmers are bearing the society costs of this pandemic on their own shoulders. This is not sustainable in many cases, so farmers are having big losses in their income, which also affects the economic conditions of their families and communities.

Access to low-rate credit should be made available to the farmers with risk assessment criteria that reflect the farming condition reality and customized according to the local conditions. Banks and insurances should be made able to release real time funding to those farmers, who have to invest in their farms to improve standards to address COVID 19 challenges and reconvert the production patterns.

For example, the **Uganda National Farmers' Federation, UNFFE**, underlines that mainstream banks, SACCOS<sup>6</sup> and village banks are not working properly so farmers cannot get credit while the sector would urgently needs

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<sup>3</sup> More information about the Cambodian situation is available here: <https://www.wfo-oma.org/covid-19/farmers-challenges/covid-19-what-cambodian-farmers-are-experiencing/>

<sup>4</sup> Italian Farmers' Organisations, Campagna Amica (Coldiretti) and CIA Agricoltori have been using their websites to enable their farmers members to sell online and deliver home to consumers.

Campagna amica home delivery: <https://spesaacasa.campagnamica.it/cart/>

CIA agricoltori home delivery: <https://iprodottidalcampoallatavola.cia.it/>

<sup>5</sup> More information about the situation in Nepal is <https://www.wfo-oma.org/covid-19/cooperative-in-nepal-fighting-against-covid-19/>

<sup>6</sup> Savings and Credit Co-Operative Society

production, transport, storage and post-harvesting handling, food processing and agro-processing supporting finance.<sup>7</sup>

A completely different example comes from **France** where some agricultural banks and insurance companies have announced that they will cover farmers' losses related to COVID 19<sup>8</sup>.

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## IMPACT ON SPECIFIC AGRICULTURAL SECTORS

- **Livestock and dairy:** concerns about the impact of the virus on the broader agricultural economy are likely to have an even larger impact on dairy product prices. Many countries especially in the European Union were already hovering just above a recession prior to the viral outbreak and this event is likely to push them over the edge. The U.S. farmers have enjoyed strength in the economy but are now also paying the price of this pandemic when it comes to dairy products. This is also due to the lockdown of industries processing dairy products that are reducing their buying, which is making price going down, bringing huge costs for the farmers. For example, farmers in the **USA** were invited to dump their milk because of the lack of buyers. This same situation applies to developing countries where lack of infrastructure and longer distances from rural to urban areas make it even more difficult for the majority of people to access stores<sup>9</sup>.

In **Italy**, there's speculation in progress caused by the decrease in outlets due to closures in the ho.re.ca sector, with unjustified request to decrease the price of milk paid to farmers<sup>10</sup>.

Concerning the **Austrian** dairy sector, there are worries about the access to export markets (especially Italy – spot market). Furthermore, ups and downs on the demand side (panic buying – UHT Milk vs break down of demand from gastronomy) occur. Besides, milk industries, meat processors have been also affected. For example, meat processing industry in Austria (slaughterhouses) depends to a large extent (80%) on the foreign workforce (commuters from eastern European countries). Any restrictions of free movement at borders have an impact on the processing chain<sup>11</sup>.

In **Denmark**, the Beef and Veal sector reports a significant decrease in exports to the southern part of Europe during the outbreak. Regarding third countries, there have been delays in documentation and transit is slowing down the export<sup>12</sup>.

- **Ornamental sector:** Even worse situation is for the ornamental sector (flowers and ornamental plants, trees and bulbs) that is most affected by the social distancing and following cancellation of all gatherings, which has reduced buying flowers to the point that this produce is going from farm to waste, as it perishes

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<sup>7</sup> More information about the Ugandan situation is available here: <https://www.wfo-oma.org/covid-19/farmers-challenges/form-a-national-food-nutrition-security-task-force-to-avert-the-effects-covid-19-pandemic-in-uganda/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.francebleu.fr/infos/economie-social/coronavirus-les-assurances-vont-elles-indemniser-les-pertes-1587612863>

<sup>9</sup> For more information: <https://www.wfo-oma.org/covid-19/farmers-challenges/form-a-national-food-nutrition-security-task-force-to-avert-the-effects-covid-19-pandemic-in-uganda/>

<https://www.wfo-oma.org/covid-19/covid-19-highlights-from-zimbabwe-farmers-union/>

<https://www.wfo-oma.org/covid-19/farmers-challenges/covid-19-what-cambodian-farmers-are-experiencing/>

<sup>10</sup> More information about the Italian situation is available here: <https://www.wfo-oma.org/covid-19/what-italian-farmers-need-to-address-covid-19-challenges/>

<sup>11</sup> More information about the Austrian situation is available here: <https://www.wfo-oma.org/covid-19/farmers-challenges/covid-19-and-the-austrian-solution-to-guarantee-workers-in-agriculture/>

<sup>12</sup> More information about the Danish situation is available here: <https://www.wfo-oma.org/covid-19/farmers-challenges/coronavirus-facts-and-tips-from-the-danish-agriculture-food-council/>

too quickly to be preserved, creating great loss for the farmers. For the operators of the sector revenues have dropped to almost nothing. In **Austria** for example, mid-March until June is the most crucial time for the horticultural business (50-70% of the annual turnover). Currently, essential supply chains are broken, due to restrictions: no selling through building centres, garden centres, flower shops (lockdown) depending on the time of restrictions (some weeks vs some months). That could have a devastating impact on the sector<sup>13</sup>.

Also, in **Denmark**, the most impacted agricultural sectors are flowers and plants as well as fruit and vegetables. General issues that most of the Danish agricultural sectors report back regard transport – Especially export to third countries where border issues and delayed documentation seems to be a common issue for all industries<sup>14</sup>.

**Italy** as well counts 1 billion of plants and flowers not marketed in the nursery gardening sector, knowing that 75% of the turnover of nursery gardening businesses is realized in this period<sup>15</sup>.

- **Wine, Beer and spirits:** Same unfortunate situation applies to the wine, beer and spirits sector. The outbreak adds pressure to compartments that already struggle worldwide: the wine sector is actually already highly impacted by climate change and the all wine, beer and spirits have experienced trade restrictions lately amid “trade wars”. Cancellation of events, trade issues related to the closure of borders, the crisis of the tourism sector due to lockdown of Countries has hit this compartment very hard. Now the sector is under great pressure, trying to make some profit through the online shipping, with uncertain times ahead in terms of production.

In **Italy** for example, most wine and beer producers rely on the Ho.Re.Ca. sector (Hotel/Restaurant/Catering), as their almost exclusive sales channel and these days they are witnessing the zeroing of national sales. There is also strong concern about the annulment of exports, due to restrictive measures implemented<sup>16</sup>.

- **Fruits and vegetable sector:** For many fruit and vegetables growing farmers, the time between March and May is particularly florid, but this year, due to the pandemic outbreak they are struggling to sell their products. The fruits and veg sector have been hit as well by the lockdown and measures undertaken by countries to fight coronavirus with lack of marketing and buyers and falling in prices. For instance, in Austria, restrictions in the free movement are deeply compromising the availability of labour force in the fruit and vegetable sector. The growing season has started already or is about to begin, and +/- 3000 workers are needed. Most of them are commuters (daily/weekly) and seasonal workers coming from the

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<sup>13</sup> More information about the Austrian situation is available here: <https://www.wfo-oma.org/covid-19/farmers-challenges/covid-19-and-the-austrian-solution-to-guarantee-workers-in-agriculture/>

<sup>14</sup> More information about the Danish situation is available here: <https://www.wfo-oma.org/covid-19/farmers-challenges/coronavirus-facts-and-tips-from-the-danish-agriculture-food-council/>

<sup>15</sup> More information about the Italian situation is available here: <https://www.wfo-oma.org/covid-19/what-italian-farmers-need-to-address-covid-19-challenges/>

<sup>16</sup> Idem

eastern European countries (Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania), as well as from outside the EU (Ukraine)<sup>17</sup>.

In **Italy**, significant losses are due to the transports' slowdown, which cause the perishing of products. A collapse in consumption of up to 1/3 is at risk due to the regulatory restrictions for the Ho.Re.Ca. channels<sup>18</sup>.

- **Fisheries and aquaculture:** In the fisheries and aquaculture sector, there are many implications. The reduced demand in restaurants and hotels, coupled with many markets closed, have brought to a decrease of wholesale fresh fish prices, while there is restricted access to storage and alternative marketing facilities. Fishers also face difficulties to meet the new sanitary requirements and the social distancing measures. Because of these difficulties, a large part of the fleet has been forced to tie up<sup>19</sup>.
- **Farm workers:** In many countries farm workers come from neighbour or farer countries and with the social distancing and lockdown conditions is very difficult for people to move with the double effects of having less workers on the farm and less income in the farm workers' families. This period of time calls for seasonal workers to help farmers running their operations and due to the COVID-19 outbreak, farmers from different locations are expressing their worries and asking their governments to take action to make sure that workers from foreign Countries can move different locations to perform work on farms.

In some Countries, Governments have made sure that workers from outside the States' borders could be allowed to get into the territory, in order to make sure that farms could run their work smoothly. In Norway, the farmers' union has been working continuously with the government to get solutions. The rules are now eased so workers in the primary sector and the industry can access our country<sup>20</sup>. In **Canada**, as well, the Government set up Agreements with specific Countries to allow workers to get into the State territory and reach farms.<sup>21</sup>

To face workers' availability challenges, Farmers' organisations have provided their members with platforms to match demand and supply of labour for the farms. This is the case, for instance, in **Austria**<sup>22</sup>, **Italy**<sup>23</sup> and the **United Kingdom**<sup>24</sup>.

- **Health on the Farm:** Worldwide, farmers are a relatively old population, as compared to the general worker population. In this special moment of COVID 19 pandemic outbreak, farmers throughout the world are in need to protect themselves, the farm labours and their produce with sanitation measures that are not always easy to implement. Sanitizers, face masks and gloves are difficult to find almost everywhere,

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<sup>17</sup> More information about the Austrian situation is available here: <https://www.wfo-oma.org/covid-19/farmers-challenges/covid-19-and-the-austrian-solution-to-guarantee-workers-in-agriculture/>

<sup>18</sup> More information about the Italian situation is available here: <https://www.wfo-oma.org/covid-19/what-italian-farmers-need-to-address-covid-19-challenges/>

<sup>19</sup> More information about the situation of fishermen here: "How is COVID-19 affecting the fisheries and aquaculture food systems", FAO 2020 <http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/ca8637en/>

<sup>20</sup> More information about the Norwegian situation is available here: <https://www.wfo-oma.org/covid-19/farmers-challenges/norwegian-farmers-tackle-covid-19-impacts/>

<sup>21</sup> For more information: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/london/canada-lifts-travel-restrictions-for-foreign-workers-1.5505579>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.wfo-oma.org/covid-19/farmers-challenges/covid-19-and-the-austrian-solution-to-guarantee-workers-in-agriculture/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.wfo-oma.org/covid-19/coronavirus-cia-agreement-with-synergie-italia-to-find-agricultural-workers/> and <https://lavoro.coldiretti.it/Pagine/default.aspx>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.wfo-oma.org/covid-19/covid-19-nfu-uk-launches-a-central-online-recruitment-hub/>

especially in rural areas and with the lockdown is becoming more and more difficult to find. Also, small towns and villages in the rural areas are usually quite distant from cities, which might be helpful in terms of reducing the risks of infection, but very negative both for rural and urban areas if the virus spreads, or in case of developing countries with lack of appropriate infrastructures (roads, transport) or in case cities are isolated due to the outbreak as it is happening nowadays in many Countries.

Farmers Organisations' worldwide have been working hard to provide the farming community with tips on the way to manage their work staying safe and ensuring the health of every and each worker on the farm.

In **South Africa**, for example, AGRI SA has contingency plans in place and advise its producers regularly on workplace hygiene and what to do when you suspect a worker has the virus<sup>25</sup>.

In **Denmark**, DAFIC is promoting within the Danish rural community measures to mitigate the spread of the virus and still maintain production levels and limit the risk of infections<sup>26</sup>.

In **Cambodia**, CFAP, has underlined that the health on the farm is high-risk as most of our farmers live in the rural areas and they are poor; first, they need to be able to keep themselves alive with a little amount of money compared to before the COVID-19 outbreak. The organisation is using a messaging app to share information with its members who have smartphones and invite them to keep safe, far away from the crowd and in quarantine<sup>27</sup>.

## 2. IMPACT OF COVID 19 ON THE GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY

It is fundamental to ensure that there are no disruptions in the value chain, so that food can reach the consumers easily, with a special attention to be paid to the most vulnerable regions and communities.

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### FOOD LOSS AND WASTE<sup>28</sup>

In these times of lockdown when all the sectors are blocked, the impact in terms of food loss and waste is huge and the situation it is not likely to get better soon. The majority of farmers are losing their products as they are not able to harvest due to the lack of workers, social distancing, lack of access to inputs, fuel for the machineries among others. Farmers' markets are closed. All the food farmers are producing is at risks of remaining in the fields, unsold, wasted. This situation, especially in those areas of the world that are already food insecure, has a huge impact on food security and nutrition.

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<sup>25</sup> More information is available here: <https://www.wfo-oma.org/covid-19/roundup-on-covid-19-impacts-on-agrisa-member-farmers-activity-in-south-africa/>

<sup>26</sup> More information is available here: <https://www.wfo-oma.org/covid-19/farmers-challenges/coronavirus-facts-and-tips-from-the-danish-agriculture-food-council/>

<sup>27</sup> More information is available here: <https://www.wfo-oma.org/covid-19/farmers-challenges/covid-19-what-cambodian-farmers-are-experiencing/>

<sup>28</sup> For more information: <http://www.fao.org/food-loss-reduction/resources/covid-19-flw-related-readings/en/>



In many Countries, Farmers' organisations are reporting their farmers forced to have their production lost (Farmers dumping milk in the UK<sup>29</sup>, in the USA<sup>30</sup>; Farmers forced to have harvests rotted or destroyed in different parts of Africa<sup>31</sup>, India<sup>32</sup> and Pakistan<sup>33</sup>

In Zimbabwe, the national Farmers' Union ZFU is proposing a way out: for the fresh produce, they propose to put in place measures to manage postharvest losses, including low-cost value addition technologies like solar drying and high-tech measures like cold rooms and freezers. Farmers in their commodity associations can pool resources together to have postharvest handling facilities in place to manage losses quickly<sup>34</sup>.

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## NUTRITION

**Malnutrition increases**, with lack of availability of fresh and healthy products which lead to the consumption of unhealthy and cheaper food, with consequent higher exposure to diseases in general. Governments, in collaboration with farmers' organisations and agricultural cooperatives, should think of smart and alternatives ways to support farmers and help them be in closer contact with consumers, maybe supporting and promoting more digital applications through which consumers can buy fresh products online that the farmers can send to their houses in case they cannot sell them directly. Also, in these unprecedented situation that we are living these days due to the Covid19, a stronger network should be created through which farmers could sell their products to hospitals, rest homes, charities, homeless and women's shelters among others, places that might face even harder times at the moment, so that farmers' production would not go wasted. International Financial Institutions will have to cooperate with Farmers' Organizations to make sure that healthy food be delivered to those most food insecure by creating channels and scaling up investments in rural areas.

Under these circumstances, it might also be good to reflect on how to support urban and peri-urban agriculture as well as rethinking of the relations between urban and rural areas. Farmers are demonstrating big commitment in helping the most affected parts of the society with Several initiatives to help the most vulnerable segments of the society.

**Coldiretti**, Italian Farmers' Organisation, put in place several initiatives, for example<sup>35</sup>: "Spesa sospesa" (Suspended Groceries): to help fight the new poverty and face the crisis, citizens who receive groceries at home through the "Campagna Amica" farmers' markets and farms can decide to donate food to the most disadvantaged families. Fruit, vegetables, flour, cheeses, meats or other Made in Italy food products, are delivered for free by the farmers to the families in need, in agreement with the Municipalities.

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<sup>29</sup> For more information [https://theconversation.com/why-farmers-are-dumping-milk-down-the-drain-and-letting-produce-rot-in-fields-136567?utm\\_source=twitter&utm\\_medium=bylinetwitterbutton](https://theconversation.com/why-farmers-are-dumping-milk-down-the-drain-and-letting-produce-rot-in-fields-136567?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=bylinetwitterbutton)

<sup>30</sup> For more information: [https://abcnews.go.com/US/dairy-farmers-dumping-milk-amid-covid-19-pandemics/story?id=70268302&cid=social\\_twitter\\_abcn](https://abcnews.go.com/US/dairy-farmers-dumping-milk-amid-covid-19-pandemics/story?id=70268302&cid=social_twitter_abcn)

<sup>31</sup> For more information: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mZJhc3\\_A0hc&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mZJhc3_A0hc&feature=youtu.be)

<sup>32</sup> For more information: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/karnataka/covid-19-impact-in-despair-farmers-destroy-crops-in-karnataka/article31229662.ece>

<sup>33</sup> For more information: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/covid-19-lockdown-sparks-harvest-crises-in-pakistan-india/1799536>

<sup>34</sup> More information about the Zimbabwean situation is available here: <https://www.wfo-oma.org/covid-19/covid-19-highlights-from-zimbabwe-farmers-union/>

<sup>35</sup> More information is available here: <https://www.wfo-oma.org/covid-19/covid-19-coldiretti-initiatives-to-the-benefit-of-farmers-and-the-most-vulnerable-population/>



Other Farmers' Organisations are putting in place actions to help the poorest donating food, for example in **South Africa**<sup>36</sup> and **United States**<sup>37</sup>.

Farmers' role in the global achievement of food and nutrition security for all is now clearer than ever, as well as their interconnection with all other actors of the value chain, from inputs to consumers.

***#FamersNeverGiveUp #ThankYouFarmers***

***Please, Visit the WFO COVID-19 Agri-Information Hub:***

***[www.wfo-oma.org/covid-19-agri-information-hub](http://www.wfo-oma.org/covid-19-agri-information-hub)***

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<sup>36</sup> For more information <https://www.farmersweekly.co.za/agri-news/south-africa/western-cape-farmers-donate-to-those-in-need/>  
<https://twitter.com/lanCameron23/status/1257597414313091073?s=20>

<sup>37</sup> More information <https://twitter.com/MNFarmersUnion/status/1258036833952444416?s=20>