

The United Fresh Produce Association has estimated the industry will take a US\$5bn hit from the Covid-19 outbreak, in addition to billions of dollars in lost sales.

The organization, which represents 1,500 member companies from across the fresh produce supply chain, has urged Congress to mitigate the challenges facing the sectors that have been impacted most severely due to the pandemic.

In a statement on Monday evening, United Fresh said the immediate impact felt by the fresh produce supply chain would be US\$5bn for exposure for lost inventory and risk to growers, US\$1bn a week in lost sales, as well as tens of thousands employees furloughed.

United Fresh on Saturday sent a letter to Speaker Pelosi, Senate Majority Leader McConnell, House Minority Leader McCarthy, Senate Minority Leader Schumer - and a similar letter to USDA Secretary Perdue - requesting they consider its recommendations.

Among the many specific sector relief requests, it urged Congress to establish a US\$1bn fund that would be utilized to address claims filed by foodservice distributors who have outstanding expenditures to grower-shippers. (Since sending the letter, it has said this fund should be increased to US\$5bn based on new information.)

It also requests that Congress makes an additional US\$1bn available under DoD Fresh and USDA Vendor Program to help meet the needs of schools and all emergency feeding sites that are experiencing increased demand.

In addition, it wants US\$225m of funding provided for the Supplemental Nutrition for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) to accommodate a temporary increase to the cash-value voucher benefits.

Meanwhile, in a [statement](#), United Fresh president and CEO Tom Stenzel said it's "unfathomable to be shifting as much as 40-50% of the food supply from the foodservice channel to retail outlets" amid a rapid shift in consumer eating habits.

"And that's in the midst of a crisis that is telling people to stay home, shutting institutions that facilitate our supply chain, and ignoring that the very companies essential to putting food on the table are bleeding cash needed to stay in business," he said.

He also announced that United Fresh has formed a partnership with the National Grocers Association to link produce foodservice distributors to their member grocers who need store-door-deliveries and other support to keep their shelves stocked.

