



# Rural Road to Recovery

## Priorities and Action Plans of the Indiana State Department of Agriculture



The mission of the Indiana State Department of Agriculture is to support growth in Indiana agriculture by serving as an advocate at the local, state and federal level; defining and nurturing economic opportunity in the food, fuel and fiber sectors; and enhancing the stewardship of natural resources on agricultural land.

### PRIORITY 1

#### Assess and mitigate the impacts of COVID 19 on Indiana's agriculture and food system

**Supply Chains:** Examine supply chain disruptions associated with COVID 19 on Indiana agriculture, such as the availability of key farm inputs, delivery of farm products to processors, and the marketing of agricultural products to regional, national and international markets.

**Resilience to Economic Shocks:** Work with key agencies and organizations to develop and deliver programs targeted to farmers, processors, agribusinesses, and biofuel refiners that seek to strengthen their resilience to economic shocks.

**Communicate Supply Chain Resiliency:** Engage a broad community of producers and agribusinesses in discussions around what worked and did not work with respect to the supply chain; determine the role that ISDA can play moving forward in assisting every aspect of the food value chain to communicate information about this important topic to larger audiences.

**Indiana Food Insecurity Taskforce:** Partner with State agencies, grocery retailers and associations, transportation, and volunteer organizations to identify short and long term options for reducing food insecurity.

### PRIORITY 3

#### Expand access to information and programs that support the personal health and financial stability of farmers and agribusiness owners/operators

**One-Stop Center:** Serve as a one-stop source for information on federal and state financial assistance available to Indiana's agricultural community.

**Information and Education:** Partner with key agencies, organizations and higher education institutions to deliver information/programs on stress management, financial and business management, workplace sanitation and other related topics.

### PRIORITY 2

#### Increase access and deployment of broadband services needed to support on-farm and farm household activities

**Broadband Footprint:** Identify farming areas with limited access to broadband services, in partnership with the Indiana Office of Broadband Opportunities.

**Broadband Access:** Work with appropriate state agencies, local government agencies and relevant state organizations to improve broadband access to farmers and agribusinesses.

**Broadband Application:** Partner with higher education institutions and other relevant organizations to accelerate deployment of digital applications by farmers, such as the use of digital marketplace platforms.

**Online Remote Work Certification:** Enhance online remote workforce training opportunities for farm households seeking off-farm income options.

### PRIORITY 4

#### Strengthen the pipeline of individuals seeking careers in agriculture

**New Entrants into Farming:** Increase awareness of beginning farmer programs, including those targeted to military veterans.

**Career Awareness:** Collaborate with youth serving organizations and local school systems to increase awareness of agriculture-related career opportunities for a diversity of young people living in urban, suburban and rural areas of Indiana.

**Career Pathways:** Partner with appropriate state agencies and organizations to inform adults and youth of the exciting career pathways available in agriculture, food, agribusiness, forestry, natural resources and other related occupations.

## Background Information

The agriculture industry is vital to the health of Indiana's economy. Over 94,000 individuals are engaged in farming in the state and agriculture's economic contribution exceeds the \$31 billion mark. Furthermore, total agricultural exports number \$4.6 billion, ranking Indiana the tenth largest farming state in the nation.

Given the importance of agriculture to the state, nation and world, the Indiana State Department of Agriculture (ISDA), in concert with the Purdue Center for Regional Development (PCRD), reached out to a mix of stakeholders and leaders to seek their input and advice on how ISDA can take steps to respond to the challenges posed by the COVID 19 pandemic. The ISDA and PCRD team developed and distributed a brief survey through a mix of channels. The people and groups targeted included: (1) ISDA advisory board members; (2) full- and part-time farmers and agribusiness owners/operators; (3) Purdue Extension agriculture and natural resources educators; (4) Farm Bureau members; (5) local economic development organizations; and more. The survey resulted in 250 responses to a series of COVID 19 related topics and potential actions strategies.

The **Priorities and Action Plans** outlined in this document align with the Indiana Agriculture strategic plan and helps to further articulate the significant issues and challenges that emerged as a direct and indirect result of the pandemic. Not only do the priorities and plans showcased in this document align with the dominant themes emerging from the survey, they also are in sync with challenges articulated in recent studies and reports released on the impact of COVID 19 on the agricultural community. In addition, they reflect initiatives that are within the mission of ISDA to address, in partnership with relevant state and federal agencies and organizations, higher education institutions, and local and regional constituents.

For more information visit [www.in.gov/isda](http://www.in.gov/isda).

## The Rural Road to Recovery Project Team

The Office of the Lieutenant Governor appointed a team from Purdue University and Ball State University to provide technical assistance and support to the five agencies and offices that have a direct report to Lieutenant Governor Suzanne Crouch. The Project Team members include Bo Beaulieu, Roberto Gallardo and Melinda Grismer with the Purdue Center for Regional Development, as well as David Terrell, Geoff Schomacker and Brian Blackford with Ball State University's Indiana Communities Institute.

