

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 16, 2020

John Mackey
Co-Founder, CEO
Whole Foods Market, Inc.
550 Bowie Street
Austin, TX 78703

Dear Mr. Mackey:

We appreciate that Whole Foods provided pay increases and bonuses for your frontline workers during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, the pay bumps and bonuses were temporary even though the ongoing global pandemic is not, and many of your employees remain at great risk of exposure to the virus due to the nature of their jobs. We urge Whole Foods to continue with increased pay for frontline workers during the duration of this national emergency and continue to take all steps needed to minimize the risk of exposure to COVID-19 for both employees and customers.

Workers at grocery stores, food processing plants, and warehouses are at a higher risk of COVID-19 because they work in indoor environments and have repeated close proximity, and sometimes prolonged exposure to coworkers and customers. Black and Latinx workers make up a disproportionate number of these frontline workers and are less likely to receive paid sick leave or have the ability to work from home. In addition, because of racial and economic disparities, workers of color, are at greater risk for COVID-19 infection hospitalization or mortality.

According to the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), more than 4,600 union grocery store workers have contracted COVID-19 and 93 have died from it, and thousands more have been exposed and unable to work while they wait for their test results. Workers should never have to choose between collecting a paycheck and working in an unsafe work environment. It is imperative that Whole Foods take all necessary steps to protect its employees, including implementing six feet of social distancing, plastic barriers when distancing is not an option, providing personal protective equipment and hand-washing and sanitizing resources, customer limits in stores to prevent crowding, customer mask requirements, and implementing other safety measures recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

In addition to continued investments in employee and customer public health, we strongly urge Whole Foods to ensure continued pay increases for the remainder of this public health emergency. While countless small businesses and other companies have been harmed or forced to close due to COVID-19, grocery stores have been largely resilient in the face of the pandemic, and many have seen their revenues increase. This is a testament to all your employees at Whole Foods, but without the workers who stock the shelves, keep the store clean, make and prepare

food, and work directly with customers, meeting the needs of customers during the pandemic would not be possible. Whole Foods has only been able to provide these critical services across the country because employees continued to show up to work despite the significant risks associated with this virus.

It is now clear that – despite numerous public health restrictions and stay at home orders at the local, state, and national level – the threat of COVID-19 remains. In fact, cases and hospitalizations continue to spike in communities across the country. As such, while this pandemic and public health emergency continues, front-line employees at Whole Foods deserve continued pay increases.

During this time of unprecedented economic and public health challenges, it is imperative that businesses like Whole Foods recognize the sacrifice of your workers for their essential service. To reduce your workers’ COVID-19 risk, your company must fully implement all workplace safety standards recommended by the CDC and OSHA. In addition, continued pandemic pay increases for the duration of the public health emergency are an important recognition of the value of your workers to both the company and the communities they serve. Your employees have always been essential, but this pandemic has underscored just how critical they are to Whole Foods’ success and to our country. We urge you to compensate and protect them accordingly.

Sincerely,

[/s/Sherrod Brown](#)

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

[/s/Elizabeth Warren](#)

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

[/s/Bernard Sanders](#)

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

[/s/Kamala D. Harris](#)

Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator

[/s/Richard Blumenthal](#)

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

[/s/Christopher S. Murphy](#)

Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator

[/s/Kirsten Gillibrand](#)

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

[/s/Sheldon Whitehouse](#)

Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator

/s/Tammy Duckworth

Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator

/s/Richard J. Durbin

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

/s/Cory A. Booker

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

/s/Jack Reed

Jack Reed
United States Senator

/s/Robert P. Casey, Jr.

Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator