



SPUR

San Francisco | San Jose | Oakland

The Honorable Scott Wiener, Chair
Human Services Committee, California State Senate
1020 N Street, Room 521
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Senate Bill 900 (Wiener) – SUPPORT

Dear Chairperson Wiener:

SPUR is proud to co-sponsor the California Fruit and Vegetable EBT Pilot Project (SB 900), which would advance our existing state systems to fight hunger and poverty, improve health, and support California agriculture. This legislation would enable the CalFresh EBT system to integrate dollar-for-dollar matching benefits to support purchases of California-grown fruits and vegetables, and pilot community-based initiatives to implement this upgraded EBT system at grocery stores and farmers' markets through grants to locations across the state.

SPUR is very familiar with the potential of fruit and vegetable supplement programs through our work running Double Up Food Bucks in California. Our evaluation of the program, currently operating with select grocery stores in San Jose and Gilroy, shows that when low-income families have more money for fresh produce, they buy and consume more fruits and vegetables and are able to stretch their food budgets further. Additionally, the program provides economic development for the participating grocers who sell more produce, which, in turn, supports California's farmers.

Through our experience working with grocers, CalFresh customers, and community partners, we know that the program would have an even greater potential for positive impact – and an ability to scale more broadly – if it was easier to adopt, easier to use, and easier to administer. Integrating fruit and vegetable supplemental benefit programs, like Double Up Food Bucks, with the state's EBT system would make that possible. By transitioning from a system based on paper coupons to the electronic EBT system, the state would allow retailers to more seamlessly integrate the program into their existing systems; make it easier for customers to use their supplemental benefits; and increase the program's administrative efficiency.

We support SB 900 because:

- **The proposed EBT upgrade and pilot projects build off of proven programs that provide targeted resources that help low-income households to afford a healthy diet.** Numerous studies show that the federal CalFresh benefit amount is inadequate to support the purchase of nutritious foods that are needed for a healthy diet, particularly fruits and vegetables. Efforts to provide nutrition incentives to low-income households have shown that when low-income families have more money for fruits and vegetables, they buy and eat more fruits and vegetables. Increasing consumer purchasing power for healthy, California-grown foods leads to lower food insecurity and better health outcomes.
- **SB 900 would create a scalable state system for effective programs that reduce food insecurity, improve nutrition, and strengthen California's economy.** Despite the success of

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nutrition incentives, none of California's local programs are integrated with the EBT system. The lack of a state system prevents the ability to cost-effectively scale the program across the state. SB 900 would create and test a system that could allow for eventual expansion to markets statewide that offer a variety of California-grown produce. In addition to helping those in poverty, CalFresh exerts a multiplier effect that stimulates the economy at large. This multiplier effect is strengthened when California-grown purchases are incentivized.

- **SB 900 is a “win-win-win” that fights poverty; supports health and nutrition; and boosts California’s agriculture.** SB 900 would create market-based incentives for retailers to market California-grown produce to all customers. It would ensure that farm-direct outlets like farmers’ markets are included in a state system that would work in various retail markets. The pilots would aim to increase the purchasing power of CalFresh households, while continuing to support California’s farmers and food systems.

Thank you for your leadership on this issue. We hope that your fellow committee members will support this important legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E. Zigas', written in a cursive style.

Eli Zigas

Food and Agriculture Policy Director

cc: Senator Galgiani, Chair, Senate Agriculture Committee
Tracey Patterson, California Food Policy Advocates (co-sponsor)