



California Fruit and Vegetable Supplemental Benefits: Scaling the Positive Impact Statewide

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Fruit and vegetable supplemental benefit programs, which provide low-income families with matching dollars when they buy California-grown fruits and vegetables, make healthy food more affordable while also supporting California farmers and grocers. Numerous organizations have piloted these initiatives, also commonly known as healthy food incentive programs, at grocery stores and farmers' markets in California. Evaluations from those programs, and others nationally, show that they reduce hunger, improve health, and boost the agricultural economy.

For these programs to reach their full potential and have a greater impact, the state must provide the support and funding to make them available at grocery stores and farmers' markets throughout California.

The state has taken a couple important steps in this direction. The legislature and governor established the California Nutrition Incentive Program (CNIP) in 2015 and, between FY's 2016-2022 provided a total of \$35 million in funding from the state's general fund to support incentive programs at farm-direct and small retail outlets.¹ The California Department of Food and Agriculture leveraged this funding for an additional \$17+ million in matching federal funds. Additionally, the state has invested in technology to help these programs scale with the California Fruit and Vegetable EBT Pilot Project, authorized in 2018 with a \$9 million budget allocation. The EBT Pilot Project is testing an integration of supplemental benefits with the existing CalFresh electronic benefits transfer (EBT) card that is already accepted by most food retailers.² The California Department of Social Services is currently implementing the pilot with a target launch for fall 2022 at 95 retail locations across the state. This technology upgrade will make supplemental benefits easier for CalFresh recipients to use, simpler for food retailers to adopt, and more efficient for the state to administer at scale.

The next step is to move toward stable, long-term funding so that supplemental benefits can become a permanent supplement to the state's CalFresh program, providing long-term benefits to California families and California farmers.

The Case for Expanding Fruit and Vegetable Supplemental Benefits

Too many Californians are food insecure and suffer from diet-related disease

- As of early 2022, one of every ten adults in California report that they struggle to consistently put enough food on their table.³ This very high rate of food insecurity exists even with the CalFresh program providing food assistance to between 4-5 million Californians.⁴
- Among low-income Californians, 29% report that they can only sometimes find affordable fruits and vegetables in their neighborhood and 3% report they never can.⁵
- Research already shows that current CalFresh benefits alone do not provide enough money for families to meet the USDA's nutrition and dietary guidelines for fruits and vegetables.⁶
- At the same time, one of every four adults in the state are obese, and nearly one of every ten adults has been diagnosed with diabetes at some point in their life.⁷

Fruit and Vegetable Supplemental Benefit programs help low-income families stretch their food budgets

- The vast majority (93-100%) of CalFresh participants using Double Up Food Bucks, a fruit and vegetable supplemental benefit program operated by SPUR, in Santa Clara County and Alameda Counties in 2017-2019 reported that fruit and vegetable incentives allowed them to have more money for other food, in addition to fruits and vegetables.⁸
- Survey data from UC San Diego's ¡Mas Fresco! program found a 10% increase in the number of participants who reported being food secure after one year of receiving incentives.⁹

Fruit and vegetable supplemental benefits programs improve public health

- Initiatives that make healthy food more affordable were the most effective at improving consumption of fruits and vegetables compared to dozens of other food access interventions.¹⁰
- An in-depth, randomized control trial study of a healthy food incentive program in Massachusetts found that when low-income families had more money for fruits and vegetables they increased their consumption of fruits and vegetables in a nutritionally significant way.¹¹
- Additional studies have modeled that increased fruit and vegetable consumption due to fruit and vegetable supplemental benefit programs would lead to a decrease in Type 2 Diabetes, cardiovascular disease, heart attacks, and stroke which would, in turn, reduce healthcare costs.¹²

Fruit and vegetable supplemental benefits programs support California farmers and the California economy

- Recent modeling indicates that for every \$1 invested in a supplemental benefits program in California, we can expect to see up to \$3 in economic activity generated as a result.¹³
- The vast majority of farmers (84%) participating in Market Match - a healthy food incentive program at farmers' markets across California - reported an increase in fruit and vegetable sales.¹⁴
- Conservative estimates of a statewide expansion project that CalFresh families would redeem \$74-\$142 million in supplemental benefits at grocery stores and farmers' markets. As that increased purchasing power rippled through the economy, it would generate an estimated \$123 - \$409 million economic contribution to California's economy, with a multiplier higher than most other government stimulus programs. Earlier estimates suggest the annual supplemental benefits redeemed by CalFresh families could be as high as \$400 million annually.¹⁵

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Endnotes

¹ See: <https://cafarmtofork.cdfa.ca.gov/cnip.html>

² See: <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/ebt/california-fruit-vegetable-ebt-pilot-project>

³ US Census Bureau, *Household Pulse Survey*, “Food Scarcity - Week 41 (December 29, 2021 – January 10, 2022)”: https://www.census.gov/data-tools/demo/hhp/#/?measures=FOODSCARCE&periodSelector=41&s_state=00006

⁴ CalFresh Data Dashboard, CalFresh Persons - Monthly Participation (as of Nov 2021): <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/data-portal/research-and-data/calfresh-data-dashboard>

⁵ UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, 2015 California Health Interview Survey: <http://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/chis/Pages/default.aspx>. Low-income defined as households up to 200% of the federal poverty level.

⁶ Mulik, Kranti et al., “The Affordability of MyPlate: An Analysis of SNAP Benefits and the Actual Cost of Eating According to the Dietary Guidelines”, *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, Vol. 49, Issue 8 (September 2017), 623 – 631.

⁷ UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, *Adult Health Profiles 2015-16*, <https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/health-profiles/adults/Pages/dashboard.aspx>

⁸ John Snow Inc., *Santa Clara County Healthy Food Incentives Grocery Project: DUFBI Intercept Survey Reports 2017-2019*.

⁹ University of California, San Diego School of Medicine, Center for Community Health, *iMas Fresco! More Fresh Southern California Nutrition Incentive Program Progress Report June 1, 2019- May 31, 2020*, pg. 19.1

¹⁰ Blondin, Kelly et al, *Review of the Evidence: Health Promotion Strategies for Retail Food Shopping Venues*, University of California Nutrition Policy Institute, prepared for California Department of Public Health, September 2016.

¹¹ Bartlett, Susan, Jacob Klerman, Lauren Olsho, et al. *Evaluation of the Healthy Incentives Pilot (HIP): Final Report*. Prepared by Abt Associates for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, September 2014.

¹² Choi, Sung Eun et al, “Cost Effectiveness of Subsidizing Fruit and Vegetable Purchases Through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program,” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, Vol. 52, Issue 5, May 2017. See also: Mozaffarian D., et al., “Cost-effectiveness of financial incentives and disincentives for improving food purchases and health through the US Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): A microsimulation study,” *PLoS Med* 15 (10): 2018

¹³ See: *The Economic Contributions of Expanding Healthy Food Incentives*, endnote 15

¹⁴ Ecology Center, *Impact Report Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) Grant & California’s Market Match*, Summer 2018: https://marketmatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Market-Match-Impact-Report-2018_web.pdf

¹⁵ Dawn Thilmany, et al., *The Economic Contributions of Expanding Healthy Food Incentives*, January 2021,

<https://www.spur.org/incentivesimpact>. Earlier estimates by: Bacani, Marc et al, *Expanding Market Match: A Healthy Food Incentive Program for Low-Income Californians*, prepared for SPUR, 2015.