



AB 2153 (Arambula)

Making Healthy Food More Affordable for CalFresh Shoppers

California Fruit and Vegetable Supplemental Benefits Expansion

The Problem

Californians with low income are food insecure and can't make ends meet

- As of early 2022, one of every ten adults in California report that they struggle to consistently put enough food on their table.^[i] This very high rate of food insecurity exists even with the CalFresh program providing food assistance to between 4-5 million Californians.^[ii]
- According to a recent statewide survey, three in four Californians with low or moderate income worried about running out of food in the past year. And three in five actually did run out of food.^[iii]
- Research demonstrates 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.^[iv]
- During the pandemic, most CalFresh households have received a temporary boost in CalFresh benefits through federally-authorized "Emergency Allotments." When those boosts expire, most households will face a "benefits cliff" as their monthly allotments are drastically reduced. The state must explore every way to cushion the blow to prevent further spikes in hunger and hardship.
- CalFresh households' purchasing patterns often don't reflect the foods they need, want, or find culturally appropriate. Shopping decisions are shaped mostly by high prices and limited access, which restricts their choices.^[v]
- Among Californians with low income, 29 percent report that they can only sometimes find affordable fruits and vegetables in their neighborhood and 3 percent report they never can.^[vi]

As the state continues to weather the COVID pandemic and our current drought, California families are facing high rates of hunger and inequitable access to food while California farmers are struggling against stiff economic headwinds.

Take Action

Support AB 2153 to expand the number and geographic diversity of retailers offering supplemental benefits to CalFresh participants.

Provide sufficient funding for this expansion with one-time, multi-year funding in the state budget.

Why this Matters

Expanding this program will dramatically increase the number and geographic diversity of CalFresh households who can access supplemental benefits, moving the program one step closer to becoming a permanent supplement to CalFresh.

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The Opportunity

Fruit and vegetable supplemental benefit programs, which provide CalFresh participants with matching dollars when they buy California-grown fruits and vegetables, make food more affordable while also supporting California farmers. 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 in California, and others nationally, show that they reduce hunger, improve health, and boost the agricultural economy.

Expanding California Fruit and Vegetable Supplemental Benefits to be available to hundreds of thousands of households across the state will, in the short-term, help families afford the foods they need to stay healthy and help alleviate the economic strain farmers are currently facing. In the long-term, it will position the program to become permanently available to CalFresh families throughout California. It is a "win-win-win" that reduces hunger, improves public health, and boosts California's agricultural economy.

References

- [i] 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
- [ii] 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>
- [iii] Nourish California and Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3), 2021, available at <https://nourishca.org/event/food-hardship-hope-for-change/>
- [iv] 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.
- [v] Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "More Adequate SNAP Benefits Would Help Millions of Participants Better Afford Food," July 2021: <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/more-adequate-snap-benefits-would-help-millions-of-participants-better>
- [vi] 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.

