**Expanding Healthy Food Incentive Programs in California Policy Brief**

Fruit and vegetable benefit programs – which are also known as healthy food incentive programs and provide low-income families with matching dollars to buy California-grown fruits and vegetables —make healthy food more affordable while also supporting California farmers. Numerous organizations have piloted fruit and vegetable benefit programs at grocery stores and farmers markets in California and evaluations from those programs, and others nationally, show that they work. For these programs to reach their full potential on a larger scale and have a greater impact on hunger, health, and California agriculture, the state must make it easier for these programs to scale via the existing electronic benefits transfer (EBT) card and provide long-term funding to make these programs a permanent supplement to the state’s CalFresh program.

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

* One of every seven adults in California report that they struggle to consistently put enough food on their table.[[1]](#endnote-1) This food insecurity exists even with the CalFresh program providing food assistance to 4 million Californians.[[2]](#endnote-2)
* 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.[[3]](#endnote-3)
* 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.[[4]](#endnote-4)

**Fruit and vegetable benefit 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.[[5]](#endnote-5)
* An in-depth study of fruit and vegetable benefit 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.[[6]](#endnote-6)
* Additional studies have modeled that programs that increase fruit and vegetable consumption would lead to a decrease in Type 2 Diabetes, cardiovascular disease, heart attacks, and stroke.[[7]](#endnote-7)

**Fruit and vegetable benefit programs help low-income families stretch their food budgets**

* The vast majority (93%) of CalFresh participants in the Double Up Food Bucks project in Santa Clara County reported that by using fruit and vegetable benefits they had more money for other food, in addition to fruits and vegetables.[[8]](#endnote-8)
* A recent study found that for many families, SNAP benefits alone do not provide enough money for families to meet the USDA’s nutrition and dietary guidelines for fruits and vegetables.[[9]](#endnote-9)

**Fruit and vegetable benefit programs support California farmers**

* In 2016, 81% of farmers reported an increase in their sales due to their participation in Market Match, a healthy food incentive program at farmers’ markets across California.[[10]](#endnote-10)
* Statewide expansion of fruit and vegetable benefit programs at grocery stores and farmers’ markets could lead to $100 - 400 million in new sales of fruit and vegetables.[[11]](#endnote-11)

**Fruit and vegetable benefit programs could have a greater impact on hunger, health, and California agriculture if they were available on the CalFresh EBT Card**

* Californians would see greater benefits from fruit and vegetable benefit programs if they were offered at grocery stores and farmers markets statewide. The next step to expand their reach is to make these benefits simple to use, easy to administer, and painless to incorporate into existing business operations.
* Massachusetts and Puerto Rico, pursuing different models, have both integrated fruit and vegetable benefit programs into their respective EBT systems.[[12]](#endnote-12)
* California has the opportunity to build on previous efforts, both within the state and nationwide, and be a pioneer in making healthy food more affordable. To lead the way, the state should begin a pilot initiative that allows CalFresh participants to earn and redeem fruit and vegetable benefits on their EBT card at grocery stores and farmers’ markets.
1. UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, *Adult Health Profiles 2013-14*, http://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/health-profiles/adults/Pages/dashboard.aspx [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. California Food Policy Advocates, “Nutrition and Food Insecurity Profile”, CalFresh Individuals Participating as of Feb 2016, http://cfpa.net/county-profiles [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, 2015 California Healthy Interview Survey: http://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/chis/Pages/default.aspx. Low-income defined as households up to 200% of the federal poverty level. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, *Adult Health Profiles 2013-14*, http://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/health-profiles/adults/Pages/dashboard.aspx [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. 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. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. 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. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. 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: Pearson-Stuttard J. et al, “Reducing US cardiovascular disease burden and disparities through national and targeted dietary policies: A modelling study,” *PLoS Med* 14(6), June 2017. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. John Snow Inc., *Santa Clara County Healthy Food Incentives Grocery Project: DUFB Intercept Survey Report*, September 2017 [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. 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. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Ecology Center, *Statewide Report on Market Match, 2016*: http://www.marketmatch.org/impact/ [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Bacani, Marc et al, *Expanding Market Match: A Healthy Food Incentive Program for Low-Income Californians*, prepared for SPUR, 2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. For more information on Massachusetts, see endnote 6. For more information on Puerto Rico, see: http://www.nasda.org/News/43690.aspx [↑](#endnote-ref-12)