



Colorado WIC and Older Adult Produce Box Program

2025 END OF SEASON REPORT



2025 HIGHLIGHTS

Colorado WIC and Older Adult Produce Program

OVER \$74,000

invested into the Colorado food economy through hyperlocal food purchases. The vast majority of the food provided through this program was grown and distributed within the same county or within neighboring counties.



14,410

pounds of fresh and local food distributed



205

unduplicated WIC and Older Adult households throughout Colorado received food

FEEDBACK

When asked how they feel about the program overall on a scale of 1-5 (1= a bad experience, 5= a great experience), our partners said:

AGENCIES

100% gave the program 4 out of 5 or 5 out of 5

FARMS/ AGGREGATORS

100% gave the program 4 out of 5 or 5 out of 5

PARTICIPANTS

Over 85% participants give the program 5 out of 5

PARTNERS INVOLVED

Directly partnered with **8 farmers and aggregators**

Over 27 farms were impacted through this program either by directly contracting with Nourish or partnering with one of our aggregators.

WIC and Older Adult community members **served through 9 agencies in 6 counties** and the Southern Ute and Ute Mountain Ute Nations.



PARTICIPANT RESPONSE

80%

of program participants said the food they received through the program was **better than what they can get in their grocery store.**

85%

of participants responding said they **ate more fruits and vegetables** because of the program, up from 80% in 2024.

OVERVIEW

The [Colorado Nutrition Incentive Program](#) (CNIP), more commonly known as the WIC and Older Adult Produce Program, increases access to and consumption of Colorado-grown produce by parents, young children, and older adults experiencing economic insecurity. The program has a simple design: farmers and food aggregators provide fresh locally grown food to community members through partnerships with WIC and Older Adult agencies. The farmers and the agencies work together to design a distribution plan that will work in their communities.

Since its inception in 2019, Nourish has seen tremendous interest in this program from small farmers and aggregators, community organizations and advocates, and WIC and Older Adult Agencies. In 2024, Nourish was able to partner with less than half of those who were interested in participating in the program due to budget constraints. In 2025, the program was scaled back even further to include partners located only in specific geographic areas including Southwest Colorado and the Western Slope. There is tremendous potential for this program to continue to be refined to address food insecurity while bolstering local food economies, especially when implemented in alignment with complementary programs such as Double Up Food Bucks and Colorado SNAP Produce Bonus, WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program and the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program.

Program Goals

- Integrate partnerships with local agriculture into federal food assistance programs.
- Increase access to and consumption of Colorado-grown produce among food insecure Coloradans with a focus on women, children, and older adults.
- Support local farmers and growers by opening up new, untapped local markets and buyers.

Program Values

- **LOCAL:** the heart of this program is locally grown food reaching local people. We will continue to move this program in a direction that supports local farmers as well as the folks in their communities. The program will work to support local relationships on the ground and to connect agencies to farmers within the smallest distance possible.
- **EQUITY:** we will work to make sure resources are distributed equitably through this program, which in turn increases equity in the food system across the state. This means taking a hard look at where inequities currently exist in the food system and planning accordingly to effect change in those areas. We will ensure that BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) farmers and BIPOC communities are served through this program.
- **GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION:** we will work to make sure we are reaching communities across the state where food access is difficult and food insecurity is high.
- **SYSTEMIC CHANGE:** both through policy advocacy efforts and intentional distribution of resources, Nourish Colorado is aiming to effect systemic change through this program.
- **FLEXIBILITY:** the program will be designed so that local communities can tailor it to the needs and realities of their communities; the application and reporting requirements will be kept as simple as possible. We will remain open to innovation and dialogue!

HISTORY

The CNIP program has evolved alongside state and federal food policy shifts, growing from a small pilot to a robust statewide model of community drive procurement, pairing federal food assistance programs with locally sourced, high quality and nutritious food.

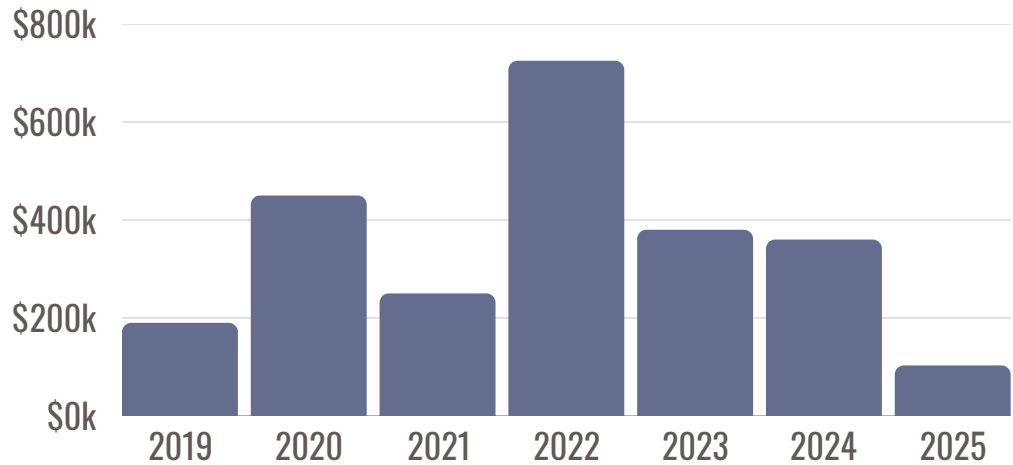
- 2018** Nourish works with the State of Colorado to develop the Healthy Food Incentive Fund
- 2019** Nourish partners with CDPHE to launch the Colorado Nutrition Incentive Program to fund produce boxes to WIC families and Older Adult community members across the state. Nourish partners with 29 growers to offer the program in 10 counties in the first year of the program.
- 2020** After the successful first year, the program grows with a one-time infusion of \$300,000 from CDPHE to address food insecurity at the beginning of the pandemic. Nourish partners with 41 growers to serve 23 counties.
- 2021** Nourish continues the program with the initial 2019 state budget plus the addition of some philanthropic dollars. Partners with 45 growers to serve 10 counties.
- 2022** Program continues to expand with an increase in the annual state contribution through the Healthy Food Incentive Fund (from \$200k to \$500k) as well as additional funding from Kaiser Permanente, Telluray Foundation and NextFifty. Nourish partners with 76 growers to offer the program in 28 counties.
- 2023** The State HFIF contribution shifts to support Double Up Food Bucks, but with the release of the USDA Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program (LFPA) funding, the program was decentralized and several partners leveraged LFPA awards to offer produce boxes to WIC and Older Adult community members across the state, collectively investing over \$1.2 million dollars in the Colorado food economy while providing food to low income community members. Nourish alone partners with 26 farms serving 20 counties.
- 2024** Nourish utilizes LFPA+ continued funding as well as private philanthropic dollars to continue to run the program. Many other partners continue to run similar programs independently. Nourish partners with 27 farms/aggregators serving 24 counties. All LFPA funding was set to end in 2024, however due to extensive national advocacy about the efficacy and impact of this funding stream, additional money was allocated to the LFPA funding stream. When the Trump administration took office this additional hard earned LFPA funding was abruptly cut without ever reaching our communities.
- 2025** The budget dropped significantly in 2025 without continued LFPA funding. Two private grants remained to fund the program; Sessions Family Foundation funding was utilized across mountain communities and Common Spirit funding was specific to their service area in Southwest Colorado. The total budget of \$103,000, the lowest budget since 2019, covered all food and primary staff costs for the year.

SEASON OVERVIEW

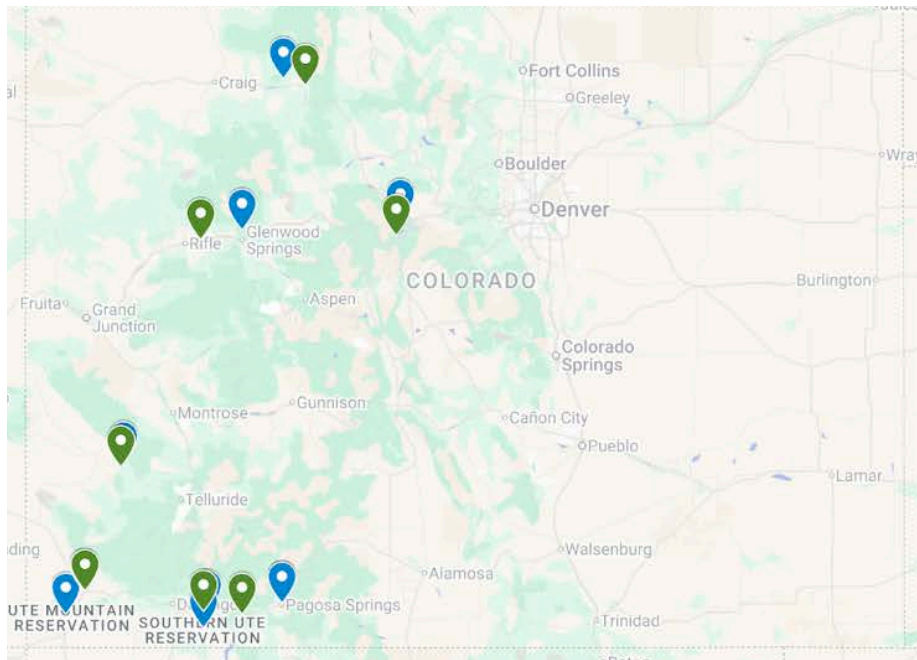
The 2025 program was significantly reduced in size and capacity due to a sharp decrease in funding. The limited funding was geographically restricted to Southwest Colorado and rural communities through the funding opportunities. Because of the narrowing of the program in both scope and geography, instead of opening an application process, partners were invited into the program based on their location, community reached, and positive past participation.

BUDGET HISTORY

Since the program started, it has been well received across the state. The graph shows the total program budget each year which has fluctuated due to available funding.



PARTNER MAP



**Agencies are in blue and Farm/Aggregators are in green.*

EVALUATION METHODS

Data was gathered from the following sources for this report:

- All farms and aggregators submitted itemized invoices with item prices and total poundage on a monthly basis.
- All partners helped make sure that participants receiving food filled out a survey either online or on paper, available in both english and spanish.
- **133 participants responded to the survey**, representing well over half of the households who received food from the program. The participation rate in the survey was up significantly from years past, resulting in better participant data and reflecting the quality of relationships on the ground administering the program.
- All agency partners and farm/aggregator patterns were required to fill out an end of season survey online.

INVESTING IN COMMUNITY & RELATIONSHIPS

Community relationships are the heart of the WIC and Older Adult Produce Program. In the early years of this program, Nourish often acted as a convener, pairing farms with WIC and Older Adult agencies where there were no existing relationships. As those relationships have become stronger and Nourish has been able to invest in them both financially and logistically over several years, Nourish's role fades to the background, acting more as a wholesale food purchaser while the partners decide how to best serve their communities. As trust develops, there is increasing flexibility that can be brought to the program so that it can truly meet the community's needs. With this long term investment from multiple partners, we see many positive benefits including: **folks receiving the food get personalized cooking and nutrition tips (68%) that are offered without stigma or formalities of structured nutrition education classes, participants in the program eat more fruits and vegetables (85%), try new foods (41%), and share food with their friends and families (71%).**

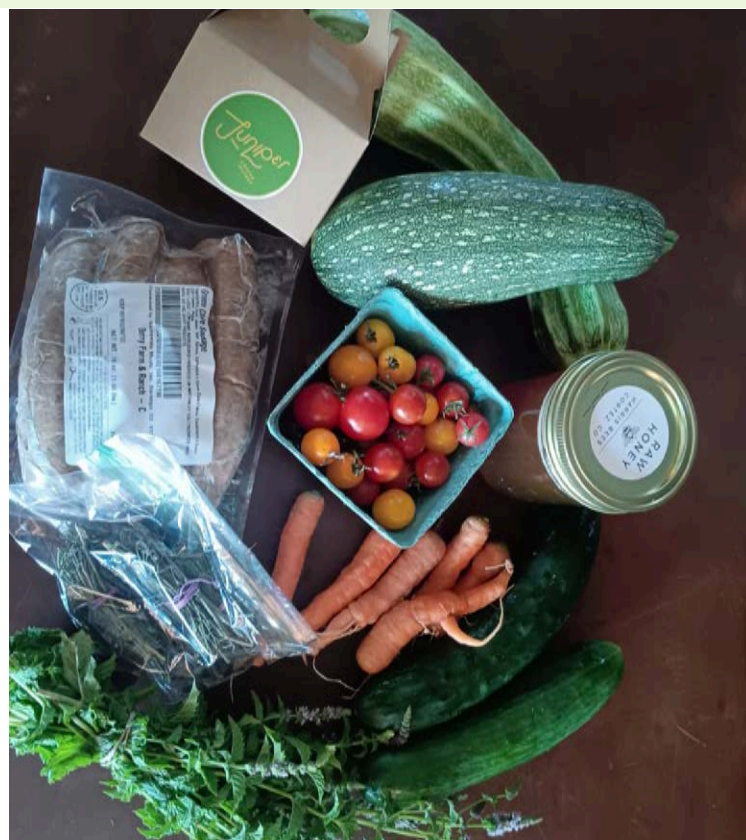
Four Corners Food Coalition has expanded the model of the WIC and Older Adult Produce Program to run their Indigenous Shared Agriculture (ISA) program. This program aggregates produce from regional farmers, and incorporates cultural specificity and traditional food access for Ute and Dine' families and elders. The weekly food boxes are coupled with bi-monthly traditional foods classes which highlight the culturally specific items in the food boxes and create space for story telling and intergenerational connection. Within Indigenous communities, these are some of the most important preventative factors, moving the model far beyond a food access program. **100% of survey respondents said they ate more traditional foods because of the ISA.**



“Some of the youth that participated in our program made some amazing meals. They were excited to learn about the foods they were receiving. They talked about trying foods for the first time, preparing meals they learned about from us and harvesting the foods. Each week I looked forward to hearing their new experiences with food. They were so excited to share and we were excited to hear.

This program brought back the feeling of community with everyone. We shared ideas, experiences, recipes, laughter and pure enjoyment of each other's company. The families we served became our extended family. It wasn't just a food program but a reconnection to each other, our farming relatives, our food, our plants and our land.”

- Amber Lansing, ISA Coordinator
Four Corners Food Coalition

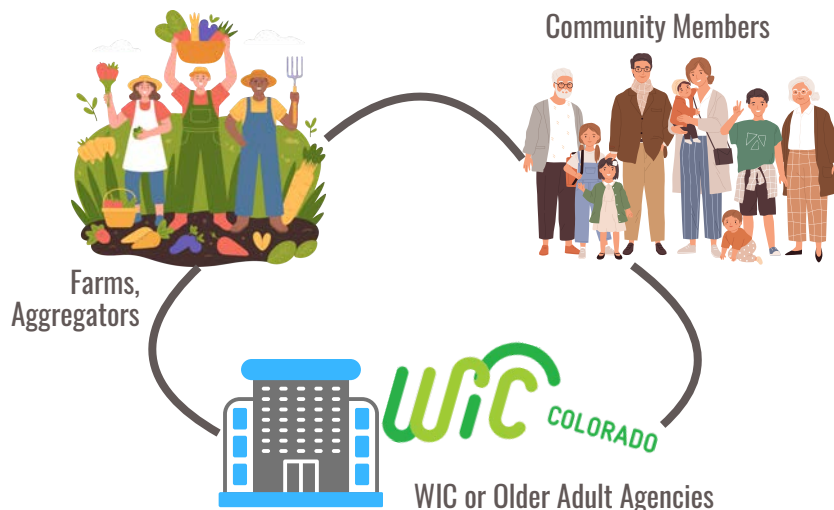


FINDING BALANCE IN THE MODEL

The program has three essential components: Local Farm/Aggregator, WIC or Older Adult Agency, and Community Members who receive the food!

The program runs best when the agency partner and the farm partner are both invested and active in the program OR when the one partner is able to take on the majority of the work for both partners. When one element of the equation is out of balance the program doesn't run as well. In the

off season, significant time has gone into meeting with partners to build relationships, discuss roles, divvy up workloads, and think through logistics. These pre-season planning meetings ensure that the program runs smoothly and all partners are in good communication with one another. When running with a strong team on the ground, this model demonstrates that investing in relationship based food systems produces social and cultural returns beyond food access strengthening community identity, health, and resilience.



Several surveys from the Ute Mountain Ute WIC community extend their gratitude to the WIC staff who was able to coordinate all the distributions of the food provided by their aggregator partner, Good Sams. If transportation was an issue for families, she would deliver the food to their homes. In a small community with a smaller case load, this is a more feasible reality for the agency partner.



One farm partner noted that the agency partner recruited people to the program but maybe didn't thoroughly explain to them the commitment of a weekly CSA. The pick up rate was about 50% each week. Additionally, the survey response was about 30% of participants. Overall, we see less engagement and less efficacy of the program in these types of circumstances when the partnership between the agency and the farm is loosely aligned.

“This was quite easy for me this year because our farm partner did most of the work. I greatly appreciated their involvement!”

-WIC Director

FINDING BALANCE IN THE MODEL



In Pagosa Springs, Terra Walk Farm provides food to both the Archuleta Public Health WIC agency and the Archuleta Seniors program. Both agencies have their own set of logistics to effectively distribute the food to community members. In the off season, all three of the partners get together to discuss how to best serve each segment of the community with their distinctly different needs. The results are a program deeply integrated into these relationships receiving positive responses from all partners. Chris of Terra Walk Farm provides printouts each week about what's in the distributions as well as QR codes to recipes for the food. **16 out of 22 survey respondents gave the program a 5 out of 5 stars.**

“I loved that we were supporting a local farmer whose dream was to do what he was doing. I also loved getting organic produce that was being grown in a way harmonious with nature.”

-Participant

“Clients were always very happy to come in for the produce, they were happy with the products and always came in with a smile.”

-Agency Partner

“Now that this has become an established program in Archuleta county, the need and demand only seems to grow. Similar to previous years, we enjoy running into the food recipients and hearing the stories of how our produce is used and appreciated. We also get feedback during these times which strengthens our ability to meet the needs of families in our area. Although we are never present for actual distribution, we run into individuals who receive our produce at community events and at the grocery store. We love this aspect of the program. Because the food we grow stays in our community, our community is stronger.”

**-Chris Frederics, Farmer,
Terra Walk Farm**

WE ARE STRONGER TOGETHER

Many WIC and Older Adult agencies are increasingly overstuffed and underresourced to do their jobs. This is a heavy trend we expect to continue with the current climate of federal policy and action. This program adds an additional workload with no compensation to our agency partners. We rely on the agencies as an important link to low income community members who have established relationships and trusted communication networks. In areas where our agency partners have the capacity to take on the extra responsibility of the program, the program typically runs very smoothly. In places where they don't have the capacity for this additional work, we see lower participation rates and overall less positive results as noted. Some partners have taken it upon themselves to remedy the situation.

Pine River Shares Community Food Farm hosts pop up markets at local senior centers during busy hours. Seniors who are there, and others in the local community, can come "shop" at the market free of charge. This model increases participation overall, allows for more specificity and choice in what patrons receive, increases community connections and information sharing as folks gather around the booth to chat and share recipes, cooking and preservation techniques. This model decreases the need for agency involvement at the same time that it strengthens collaboration with senior centers. No sign ups are needed, and surveys can be administered to folks as they visit the booth. Perhaps more valuable than the surveys are the direct and weekly conversations folks who are staffing the booth engage in where they hear countless stories and field questions about the produce they are providing, not only increasing healthy food

access but also breaking through social isolation which is a significant social determinant of health, particularly in rural areas. In this example, Pine River Shares Community Food Farm utilizes the presence of the agency to reach community without asking more labor from their staff, mutually benefiting all involved. New this year was an end of season "Meet your Farmer" luncheon where farm staff were introduced to a standing ovation and innumerable expressions of gratitude. **23 out of 25 survey respondents noted that the program was easy to be involved with, often mentioning the location and set up specifically in their positive feedback.**



IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS TO PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

- Well established relationships truly make the program run well. Building relationships takes time. This model can and will build in its efficacy and efficiency as not just a food access program but as a social, emotional and physical wellness program over time.
- The CSA model is not convenient or even desirable for everyone. Oftentimes a choice model where folks can choose what produce they take home is more effective at getting people food that they can best utilize. Other times pre-packed boxes or bags are the only option that is logistically possible for partners. In some communities programs like the WIC or Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Programs (both currently unavailable in Colorado), Colorado SNAP Produce Bonus, or Double Up Food Bucks would be a better fit so folks can shop according to their schedule and food needs.
- As the funding available for this program has decreased over the past few years, we have seen several farm and agency partners be able to secure their own local funding to run the program. It would be helpful to have a mechanism to determine if local funding is available and to support partners in accessing it. If so, Nourish should allocate funding to communities where it is not otherwise available.
- Detailed invoicing ensures that Nourish is acting as a food procurement partner, not a grantor. This accountability is necessary to ensure the program's fairness. When detailed invoicing was introduced to the program it was a major hurdle for many farmers. It has gotten easier and more manageable with time and it has helped many of our farm partners set fair market prices for their products while allowing Nourish access to a much better set of data to evaluate the program.
- Surveys are limited as an evaluation tool. In person interviews or focus groups would be a great option to gather more qualitative data. More robust evaluation requires a more robust administrative budget.

STRATEGIC INVESTMENT FOR SUSTAINABILITY

In order to continue running the program, here are some important financial data points from 2025:

- The cumulative food costs for the program were about \$5.15 per pound.
- The average cost per household to run the program was approximately \$360 for the season.
- Programs ran from 11-19 weeks during peak growing season. Using a 15 week season as the metric, the average distribution was about \$24 per household per week.
- In terms of pounds, distributions tend to be lighter in the early season (greens, radishes) and heavier in the late season (squash, potatoes, onions). It's difficult to set a poundage per distribution metric due to this seasonal shift.
- Costs can shift drastically depending on the model used. For example, prepacked boxes cost more and reach fewer people than a choice pop up market where more people might visit and some will take fewer items than they'd receive in a prepacked box.
- Costs can also shift drastically between household size. Older adult households are commonly smaller than WIC households. This year, 30% of survey respondents live in a household of 1, 20% in a household of 2, 14% in a household of 3, 13% in a household of 4, 12% in a household of 5, and 11% in a household of 6 or more. Despite these variations, approx 88% of respondents said they got "just enough" food from the program, reflecting the work on the ground ensuring that the program is tailored to the people it is serving, including in terms of household size.
- Staff and materials costs are typically rolled into food costs for this program, as they typically are for wholesale farm food sales, however a line item for delivery fees for farms and aggregators should be allowable as this is a common charge for farmers delivering their produce.
- Administrative overhead for the entire statewide program is approx 20% of the total budget.
- These data points could be used to help scale the program and develop budgets to implement the program in additional communities.

POLICY TRAJECTORY

All of Nourish's programs are paired with a long-term policy strategy to institutionalize the work that we are demonstrating through our programs. The data and feedback collected is key to influencing these policy changes. The WIC and Older Adult Produce Box Program supports advocacy efforts for the following policy changes:

State Policy Efforts

- Protect and strengthen the Healthy Food Incentive Program (HFIP) as a primary state policy priority for 2026.
- Advocate for maintenance of HFIP funding and, as state budget capacity allows, increase the HFIP line item to support expanded produce access initiatives.
- Have future HFIP investments support WIC and Older Adult produce box programs, expanding the reach of fresh, local foods to more Colorado households.
- Ensure HFIP remains a reliable and equitable source of state funding for nutrition incentives, including the Double Up Food Bucks program.

Federal Policy Efforts

- Protect the federal WIC fruit and vegetable benefit in 2026 through the produce box program's demonstration of strong demand.
- Work with state and national partners to prevent efforts by some federal legislators to reduce the benefit to pre-pandemic levels.
- Collaborate with local and national organizations to expand the types of vendors authorized to accept WIC benefit, including increasing access for direct market farmers and farmers markets.
- Support investments in technology and training to help farmers adopt WIC-compatible systems and processes.
- Use program data and outcomes to inform federal advocacy to expand funding and reach of the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program and WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP), which is currently not implemented in Colorado.
- Advocate for a renewed federal investment in a program modeled after the former Local Food Purchasing Agreement (LFPA), centered on advancing equity, supporting small and mid-sized producers, and expanding access to fresh, local foods for households with limited resources, and a more flexible Farmers Market Nutrition Program model that would allow Colorado to reestablish the program and better align it with the needs of both farmers and participants.
- Deepen engagement with national coalitions advancing federal marker bills such as the Farmers to Families Act, which focuses on improving integration and expansion of WIC Cash Value Benefits (CVB) and FMNP.
- Strengthen the ability for WIC participants to use their benefits in direct-marketing settings with local farmers.

Recent Success

The Local Food Purchasing Agreement (LFPA) was a highly successful federal initiative that significantly strengthened local food access efforts nationwide, including programs such as the Colorado Nutrition Incentive Program (CNIP) and other community-based produce access models. Although LFPA is no longer active, its strong outcomes for producers, families, and local food systems have helped shape new national marker bills designed to continue and expand similar investments. These emerging efforts aim to build on LFPA's strengths and support programs like CNIP that connect federal dollars to local farmers.

Nourish Colorado played an active role in national advocacy that elevated LFPA as a leading model for equitable and community-centered food purchasing, through leading the statewide mobilization in support of H.R.4782 - Local Farmers Feeding our Communities Act, a new bill that would direct public dollars to local farmers to feed low-income communities. Six of Colorado's eight representatives signed on to co-sponsor the act in 2025.

LFPA's success created meaningful momentum for future federal initiatives that prioritize local procurement, strengthen small and mid-sized producers, and increase household access to fresh, culturally relevant foods. The lessons and infrastructure built through LFPA continue to inform national policy conversations, offering a strong foundation for next-generation federal programs that can benefit CNIP, Colorado producers, and local communities for years to come.

LOOKING AHEAD

In the current political climate, we are experiencing widespread disinvestment in food programs with a simultaneous mass disinvestment of food and social support programs across the federal government. With no end to this trend in sight, it is critical that we collectively develop models that can support our communities to eat well despite any economic hardships. Community based food systems are resilient and adaptable to the needs of the people who create them. Programs like this one, which intentionally connect federal food resources with local producers and markets, offer a powerful strategy for mitigating the harms caused by ongoing disinvestment. At the same time, they lay the groundwork for long-term systems change by investing in local capacity, infrastructure, and trust. We encourage communities to explore adapting this model to their own local strengths, assets, and needs. By learning from one another and continuing to build together, we can ensure that our communities are not only fed, but fed well.

Thank you to CommonSpirit for making this program possible!

