



**Call to California's  
Congressional Delegation:  
Protect Our Access to Food**

California  
Food Policy  
Advocates

*Farm Bill 2018*

# Introduction

The Farm Bill is the nation's most important piece of food and farming legislation and includes our state's largest anti-hunger investment, CalFresh. Each year, over four million California residents gain access to healthy food through CalFresh. As Congress drafts the next Farm Bill, it is critical that CalFresh is protected from structural changes, benefit cuts, or eligibility restrictions.

## Contents

3 The Problem

4 Local Perspectives

5 The Solution

7 References

**From small farming towns in the Central Valley to large urban centers, Californians in every community deserve an opportunity to put nutritious food on the table, especially the food grown here in our state.**

The Farm Bill is federal legislation that shapes food and agriculture for California and the entire nation. The current Farm Bill will expire in September 2018. That means, **we have an opportunity to make the next Farm Bill work for all Californians.**

We need solutions that help everyone in our great state make ends meet. As Congress drafts the next Farm Bill, we call on our elected leaders to make sure that all Californians – from farm workers to military veterans, college students to working families, and the very youngest to the very oldest among us – have enough to eat.

Forty years of research and experience tell us that the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (known as SNAP, food stamps, or CalFresh in California) is a bridge to success. CalFresh helps Californians by reducing hunger, fighting poverty, and boosting the economy. To help California and Californians reach their full potential, **we must protect CalFresh from structural changes, benefit cuts, or eligibility restrictions.**

# The Problem

Despite living in the heart of one of the world's most productive agricultural regions, 1 in 8 Californians struggles to afford enough food.<sup>i</sup> Some pockets of the state experience even deeper challenges. Fresno and Bakersfield are among the top five urban areas in the country for rates of food hardship.<sup>ii</sup> Without CalFresh, these vulnerable Californians have an increased risk of experiencing hunger.

Hunger in California is a symptom of our state's larger struggle with poverty. While California's economy grows, many people are being left behind. Today, every one in seven Californians lives in poverty - many are children.<sup>iii</sup> Our state has the nation's highest rate of childhood poverty in the nation when you take into account the cost of living.

California's expensive cost of living stretches household budgets further and further, leaving many teetering on the edge of stability. No one in our great state should have to choose between putting food on the table and paying rent, but extraordinarily high housing costs in many California communities force low-income families to make tough choices about which basic needs they can afford to meet.

**No mother should have to explain to their child why there isn't a warm dinner at night.**

Amanda Hill, Food Pantry Volunteer  
Veteran's Transition Center



At the same time, a lack of full-time jobs offering livable wages and steady hours continues to make it difficult for many Californians to achieve economic stability. While California's unemployment rate is close to the national average, in some California communities unemployment is up to twice the national average.<sup>iv</sup>



## Local Perspectives

“I am raising my grandchildren, and I am disabled. I do what I have to do to make ends meet, going to churches and food pantries. We need more benefits from CalFresh. That would really help people,” said Tiffany. Tiffany served in the military for six years and is a caregiver to her two grandchildren.

Tiffany, Marina, CA

“My granddaughter is trying to get jobs. It's so hard. She's on food stamps, she has to be very careful, she only gets so much. She's trying to get into Tracy Unified School District so she can get a decent job. In the meantime if this program gets cut what will these people do? The food giveaways don't get you nutritional things like eggs.

Dorothy, Stockton, CA.

“The need is more in Stanislaus because we have a lot of farm workers and people who work in canneries. For a time period they don't have income coming in,” said Jessica. “The cost of living here in Modesto is going up. Tech companies are moving into the Central Valley and that affects our clients. People are getting notices, their rents are doubling up. They don't have that extra money to provide for their family.

Jessica Machado, Modesto, CA.

# The Opportunity

Forty years of research and experience tell us that CalFresh is a bridge to success. CalFresh (known federally as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or food stamps) helps millions of California workers in low-paying jobs buy the food they need directly from businesses in their communities. The program reduces hunger and fights poverty, while boosting our state's economy.

CalFresh helps over four million California residents buy the food they need from local farmers and grocers.<sup>v</sup> The overwhelming majority of CalFresh participants are children and seniors. 74% are in families with children and more than 1 in 4 households have a senior.<sup>vi, vii</sup>

Some parts of California rely more heavily on CalFresh, because of deeper struggles with poverty. Compared to other regions, the Central Valley has a higher percentage of residents who rely on CalFresh to meet their basic needs. Of the 10 counties with the highest shares of residents participating in CalFresh, five are in the San Joaquin Valley: Tulare (25.5% of residents receive CalFresh), Fresno (21.8%), Merced (20.5%), Madera (18.5%), and Kern (18.3%). The remaining five are spread across California: Del Norte (19.5%), Lake (18.9%), Imperial (22.7%), and San Bernardino (18.1%).<sup>viii</sup>

The majority of CalFresh recipients are working, but rely on CalFresh to make ends meet. More than 4 in 5 families on CalFresh are working.<sup>ix</sup> They are cashiers, personal care aids, cooks, agricultural workers, and retail salespersons who work in low-paying jobs with few or no benefits and irregular hours.<sup>x</sup> Without CalFresh, these vulnerable Californians have an increased risk of experiencing hunger.



**When families are not as worried about putting food on the table, they are better able to pay for the basics like rent to keep a roof over their head, and transportation to help them get to school, child care, and work.**

At an average of just \$1.52 per meal per person, CalFresh benefits are extremely modest, but help millions of Californians avoid hunger and achieve economic self-sufficiency.<sup>xi</sup> The program kept 806,000 Californians out of poverty each year from 2009-2012, including 417,000 children. CalFresh is also a smart investment in the future of California's children. Adults who received CalFresh as a child have higher high school completion rates and lower rates of stunted growth, obesity, and heart disease compared to non-CalFresh counterparts.



## CalFresh goes even further by supporting our farms and our economy while providing good jobs for our communities.

Stores throughout the state from Safeway in Modesto to corner stores in Bakersfield, to farmers' markets in Humboldt accept CalFresh. In California, more than 25,000 retailers accept CalFresh as a form of payment for food purchases, including over 500 farmers' markets who are authorized to accept CalFresh.<sup>xii,xiii</sup> For stores located in high poverty areas, CalFresh plays an especially critical role, since a significant portion of overall sales are from shoppers who use CalFresh to help buy their groceries.

CalFresh is one of the most effective forms of economic stimulus during a downturn because most households redeem their monthly CalFresh benefits quickly and completely. Economists estimate that every dollar that households redeem under CalFresh expands the economy by about \$1.79.<sup>xiv</sup> SNAP households redeemed over \$4 billion in benefits throughout California, stimulating about \$7.2 billion in economic activity statewide.<sup>xiv</sup>

6 [www.cfpa.net](http://www.cfpa.net)

“**We have a lot of people using CalFresh here. Twenty to thirty percent of our clients use CalFresh.**  
Rageh Aldafari, Co-owner  
B Street Grocery Store in Stockton, CA

# References

---

- <sup>i</sup> Number and share of food-insecure residents by congressional district and in California are drawn from Feeding America analysis of 2001–2015 Current Population Survey on individuals in food insecure households; data from the 2015 ACS 1-year estimates on median household incomes, poverty rates, homeownership, and race and ethnic demographics; and 2015 data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics on unemployment rates. "Map the Meal Gap 2017: Food Insecurity in California by Congressional District in 2015" available at [http://www.feedingamerica.org/research/map-the-mealgap/2015/MMG\\_AllCounties\\_CDs\\_MMG\\_2015\\_1/CA\\_AllCounties\\_CDs\\_MMG\\_2015.pdf](http://www.feedingamerica.org/research/map-the-mealgap/2015/MMG_AllCounties_CDs_MMG_2015_1/CA_AllCounties_CDs_MMG_2015.pdf).
- <sup>ii</sup> National, State, and Local Index of Food Hardship. Food Research and Action Center. June 2016. Available at: <http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/food-hardship-2016-1.pdf>
- <sup>iii</sup> Number of CalFresh-receiving households below the poverty line is drawn 2016 ACS 1-year estimates, "S2201: Food Stamps/Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)."
- <sup>iv</sup> Number and percentage of unemployed district residents, as well as national unemployment rate, are drawn from CFPA analysis of 2016 ACS data "S2301: Employment Status"
- <sup>v</sup> Number and percentage of households participating in CalFresh by congressional district are drawn from CFPA analysis of U.S. Census Bureau's 2016 American Community Survey (ACS) data "S2201: FOOD STAMPS/Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)"
- <sup>vi</sup> Share of CalFresh-participating households with children (individuals under 18) and seniors (individuals above 60) is drawn from CFPA analysis of 2016 ACS data "S2201: Food Stamps/Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)"
- <sup>vii</sup> Numbers of total residents and seniors (above 60) as well as share of children (under 18) in poverty by congressional district, are drawn from CFPA analysis of 2016 ACS data "S1701: Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months." Here, poverty is defined via the Federal Poverty Measure (FPM). The FPM, unlike the Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM) and the California Poverty Measure (CPM), fails to account for the singularly high cost of living in California, and may understate the scale of poverty in California congressional districts.
- <sup>viii</sup> CalFresh Reduces Hunger in Every County in California, but Changes at the Federal Level Could Cut Benefits. California Budget and Policy Center.
- <sup>ix</sup> Number of CalFresh-participating families with one or more workers is drawn from 2016 ACS 1-year estimates, "B22007: Receipt of Food Stamps/SNAP in the Past 12 Months by Family Type by Number of Workers in Family in the Past 12 Months."
- <sup>x</sup> Reference to "cashiers, agricultural workers, personal care aides, cooks and retail salespersons" is drawn from CBPP analysis of 2013–15 ACS data on the top five occupations of CalFresh-participating workers. "Interactive Map: SNAP Helps LowWage Workers in Every State" available at <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/interactivemap-snap-helps-low-wage-workers-in-every-state>
- <sup>xi</sup> Cost estimate of \$1.52 per meal is drawn from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) analysis of Food and Nutrition Services FY2017 SNAP program data. "Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Monthly Data FY2017" available at <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/pd/34SNAPmonthly.pdf>
- <sup>xii</sup> Number of local CalFresh retailers by congressional district is drawn from CBPP analysis of USDA SNAP Retailer Locator data, last updated July 5, 2017. CBPP "SNAP Retailers Database" available at <https://www.cbpp.org/snap-retailers-database>
- <sup>xiii</sup> Number of local CalFresh retailers by congressional district is drawn from CBPP analysis of USDA SNAP Retailer Locator data, last updated July 5, 2017. CBPP "SNAP Retailers Database" available at <https://www.cbpp.org/snap-retailers-database>
- <sup>xiv</sup> Amount of economic activity generated from CalFresh redemptions in California is drawn from CBPP analysis of FNS FY2016 SNAP program data using a calculation formula provided by Moody's Analytics. "Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Monthly Data FY2016" available at <https://fnsprod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/pd/34SNAPmonthly.pdf>

## Where to Find Us

Food insecurity exists in all 58 counties in California, but so do solutions. That's why CFPA staff travel by plane, train, car, and bike to advocate for improved nutrition and health. No matter where we are in the state, we are only a click away.

**Stay current online:** [www.cfpa.net](http://www.cfpa.net)

**Find our Advocates:** [www.cfpa.net/contact-us](http://www.cfpa.net/contact-us)

**Support our work:** [www.cfpa.net/donate](http://www.cfpa.net/donate)

**Join our mailing list:** [www.cfpa.net/subscribe](http://www.cfpa.net/subscribe)

**Follow us on Twitter:** [@CAFoodPolicy](https://twitter.com/CAFoodPolicy)



For 25 years, California Food Policy Advocates has been the leading statewide policy and advocacy organization dedicated to improving the health and well being of low-income Californians by increasing their access to nutritious, affordable food. Learn more at [www.cfpa.net](http://www.cfpa.net).

### Main Office

1970 Broadway, Suite 760  
Oakland, CA 94612  
Phone 510.433.1122  
Fax 510.433.1131

### Los Angeles Office

205 S. Broadway, Suite 402  
Los Angeles, CA 90012  
Phone 213.482.8200  
Fax 213.482.8203

### San Diego Office

Senior Advocate  
Phone 510.433.1122 ext. 206