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April 17, 2018

The Honorable Holly J. Mitchell
Chair, Budget and Fiscal Review Committee
California State Senate
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Phil Ting
Chair, Budget Committee
California State Assembly
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Richard Pan
Chair, Budget Sub Health & Human Services
California State Senate
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Joaquin Arambula
Chair, Budget Sub Health & Human Services
California State Assembly
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: SUPPORT for California Fruit and Vegetable EBT Pilot in the 2018-19 State Budget

Dear Senator Mitchell, Assemblymember Ting, Senator Pan and Assemblymember Arambula,

When it comes to food, California is a state of paradox. Despite being the wealthiest state in the wealthiest nation in the world, California's prosperity has left many behind. California has the nation's highest rate of poverty, with one out of five residents living in poverty, according to the US Census Supplemental Poverty Measure.¹ California produces more fruits and vegetables than any other state in the nation, growing over 200 different of crops year round. Yet we also have shockingly high rates of hunger, with close to 40% of low-income California households unable to afford enough food to eat.

California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA) is a 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. San Francisco Bay Area Planning and Urban Research Association (SPUR) promotes good planning and good government in the Bay Area. SPUR currently operates the [Double Up Food Bucks](#) initiative, a fruit and vegetable purchase program for CalFresh shoppers in Santa Clara County.

We respectfully submit a request for \$9 million General Fund in the 2018-19 State Budget for the California Fruit and Vegetable EBT Pilot Project to increase the purchase and consumption of California-grown fruits and vegetables that are financially out-of-reach for low-income residents.

This strategic investment will link our state's agricultural riches with Californians' needs. CalFresh helps over 4 million people put food on the table on an average day. Despite the reach of CalFresh, the federal benefit levels limit the ability to purchase the healthy foods grown in our own state. To better reach CalFresh customers, we must integrate California fruit and vegetable benefits into CalFresh EBT, which is widely accepted by retailers statewide. This approach has already been successfully piloted- and subsequently implemented statewide- in Massachusetts through their Healthy Incentives Program.

We respectfully request the Legislature to work with the Administration to secure \$9 million in the 2018-19 State Budget in order to:

- Enable the CalFresh EBT system to allow CalFresh shoppers to receive a matching benefit upon eligible purchases of California-grown fresh fruits and vegetables;
- Implement seven community pilots to evaluate the efficacy of the CalFresh EBT system to provide a dollar-for-dollar match upon the purchase of California-grown fresh fruits and vegetables, and assess ease of use for CalFresh clients, administrators, and retailers.

This proposed California Fruit and Vegetable EBT Pilot Project builds upon proven programs that provide targeted resources that help low-income households to afford a healthy diet. Numerous studies show that the federal CalFresh benefit amount is inadequate to support the purchase of nutritious foods that are needed for a healthy diet, particularly fruits and vegetables.^{2, 3} When low-income families have more money for fruits and vegetables, they buy and eat more fruits and vegetables. Boosting consumer purchasing power for fruits and vegetables leads to lower food insecurity and better health outcomes.

¹ <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2017/demo/p60-261.pdf> (page 27-28)

² <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/full/10.1377/hlthaff.2013.0096>

³ <https://news.ncsu.edu/2017/09/snap-diet-cost-2017/>

This pilot would create a scalable state system to fight hunger, promote health, and strengthen California's economy. Despite the success of nutrition incentive programs across the state, none are integrated with the CalFresh EBT system. This lack of a state system is a barrier to cost-effectively scale the program to reach CalFresh households across the state. Funding this request would create and test a system that could allow for eventual expansion to more CalFresh retailers statewide that offer a variety of California-grown produce. This local economic multiplier effect of CalFresh is strengthened when California-grown purchases are supported and incentivized.

The California Fruit and Vegetable EBT Pilot is a “win-win-win” that fight poverty; supports improved health and nutrition; and boosts California’s agriculture. It creates market-based incentives for retailers to market and sell more California-grown produce to all customers. It will ensure that direct to-consumer outlets, along with grocery stores, are included in a state system that works in varied retail markets. The pilot would increase the purchasing power of CalFresh households and support California farmers. Strong leadership is needed to protect Californians from federal efforts to cut the social safety net. California must take a forward-thinking approach that builds upon our agricultural resources to break the cycle of hunger, poverty, and poor health for Californians.

We look forward to supporting the Legislature and Administration to establish the California Fruit and Vegetable EBT Pilot in the 2018-19 State Budget to advance food security, health and agriculture.

Sincerely,



Tracey Patterson
Director of Legislation
California Food Policy Advocates



Eli Zigas
Food and Agriculture Policy Director
SPUR

California Association of Food Banks
CUESA
Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano
Food Chain Workers Alliance
Food for the People
Humboldt Food Policy Council
Jewish Family Services of Los Angeles
Los Angeles Food Policy Council
National Association of Social Workers- CA
OC Food Access Coalition

Pesticide Action Network
San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative
San Diego Food System Alliance
Southern Humboldt Community Park
St Anthony's Foundation
UCLA Student Association Facilities
Commission
Western Center on Law and Poverty
WORKS
Yolo County Health & Human Services

CC: Speaker of the Assembly Anthony Rendon,
Senate President Pro Tempore Toni Atkins,
Department of Finance,
Department of Social Services,
Governor Edmund G. Brown, Jr.