

# Many Missing Out on Food Assistance

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Tuesday, October 20,  
2015

Food Policy Advocates Say 61 Percent of Eligible County Residents Don't Use State Program

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California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA) released its annual *Lost Dollars, Empty Plates* report Monday that delves further into the organization's recently published Program Access Index (PAI). The PAI, which measures CalFresh use relative to the number of eligible individuals in each county, ranks Santa Barbara 54th out of 58 counties; the lower the ranking, the higher the proportion of use.

CalFresh is a federal organization, also known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and is the largest source of nutrition assistance in California. CalFresh issues monthly electronic benefits that can be used towards food purchases at most markets to individuals who are eligible based on gross income.

The most recent data from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) shows that 47 percent of those eligible do not participate in CalFresh, while 1.8 million households in the state are unable to consistently afford enough food. Overall, Californians avoid \$2.9 billion in annual benefits. CFPA Managing Nutrition Policy Advocate Jared Call confirmed that state governments supply this USDA data, as they "are required to provide operational data quarterly and annually."

As of 2013, the CFPA estimated that approximately 61 percent of eligible Santa Barbara County residents do not participate in CalFresh. The CFPA report concludes that if the remaining 49 percent of potentially eligible individuals were to use the program, Santa Barbara residents would receive an additional \$54,500,000 annually in federally funded benefits. Other wealthy coastal counties display similar low levels of participation averaging around half. Marin County, for example, has an incomplete participation percentage of 62 percent, while San Diego County's is 52 percent. Call also confirmed that the model used to calculate these numbers and subsequent rankings employs "the same methodology across counties."