



March 15, 2022

Assemblymember Dr. Joaquin Arambula  
1021 O Street  
Suite 6240  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Senator Scott Wiener  
1021 O Street  
Suite 6630  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Support for AB 2153 — California Fruit and Vegetable Supplemental Benefits Expansion**

Dear Assemblymember Arambula and Senator Wiener:

On behalf of SPUR and Nourish California, we are writing to thank you for co-authoring AB 2153, which would expand the number and geographic diversity of retailers offering fruit and vegetable supplemental benefits to CalFresh participants. We are deeply appreciative that both of you have continued to champion this idea since co-authoring SB 900 in 2018 which took the first step toward integrating fruit and vegetable supplemental benefits into the CalFresh program.

As the state continues to weather the COVID pandemic and our current drought, California families are facing high rates of hunger and inequitable access to food while California farmers are struggling against stiff economic headwinds. The state must seize the opportunity of a historic budget surplus to boost CalFresh benefits while supporting California's agricultural sector.

Californians with low income are food insecure and can't make ends meet.

- As of early 2022, one of every ten adults in California report that they struggle to consistently put enough food on their table.<sup>1</sup> This very high rate of food insecurity exists even with the CalFresh program providing food assistance to between 4-5 million Californians.<sup>2</sup>
- According to a recent statewide survey, three in four Californians with low or moderate income worried about running out of food in the past year. And three in five actually did run out of food.<sup>3</sup>
- Research demonstrates that current CalFresh benefits alone do not provide enough money for families to meet the USDA's nutrition and dietary guidelines for fruits and vegetables.<sup>4</sup>
- During the pandemic, most CalFresh households have received a temporary boost in CalFresh benefits through federally-authorized "Emergency Allotments." When those

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<sup>1</sup> US Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, "Food Scarcity - Week 41 (December 29, 2021 – January 10, 2022)":[https://www.census.gov/data-tools/demo/hhp/#/?measures=FOODSCARCE&periodSelector=41&s\\_state=00006](https://www.census.gov/data-tools/demo/hhp/#/?measures=FOODSCARCE&periodSelector=41&s_state=00006)

<sup>2</sup> CalFresh Data Dashboard, CalFresh Persons - Monthly Participation (as of Nov 2021):

<https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/data-portal/research-and-data/calfresh-data-dashboard>

<sup>3</sup> Nourish California and Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3), 2021, available at <https://nourishca.org/event/food-hardship-hope-for-change/>

<sup>4</sup> 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.

boosts expire, most households will face a “benefits cliff” as their monthly allotments are drastically reduced. The state must explore every way to cushion the blow to prevent further spikes in hunger and hardship.

- CalFresh households’ purchasing patterns often don’t reflect the foods they need, want, or find culturally appropriate. Shopping decisions are shaped mostly by high prices and limited access, which restricts their choices.<sup>5</sup>
- Among Californians with low income, 29 percent report that they can only sometimes find affordable fruits and vegetables in their neighborhood and 3 percent report they never can.<sup>6</sup>

Fruit and vegetable supplemental benefit programs, which provide CalFresh participants with matching dollars when they buy California-grown fruits and vegetables, make food more affordable while also supporting California farmers. Numerous organizations, including SPUR, have piloted these initiatives, also commonly known as healthy food incentive programs, at grocery stores and farmers’ markets in California. Evaluations from those programs in California, and others nationally, show that they reduce hunger, improve health, and boost the agricultural economy.

Expanding California Fruit and Vegetable Supplemental Benefits to be available to hundreds of thousands of households across the state will, in the short-term, help families afford the foods they need to stay healthy and help alleviate the economic strain farmers are currently facing. In the long-term, it will position the program to become permanently available to CalFresh families throughout California. It is a “win-win-win” that reduces hunger, improves public health, and boosts California’s agricultural economy.

We are grateful for your leadership on this effort to boost CalFresh benefits while supporting a strong California agricultural economy. We are proud to cosponsor your legislation and hope the rest of the legislature will join you in supporting AB 2153.

Sincerely,



Eli Zigas  
Food and Agriculture Policy Director  
SPUR



Jared Call  
Senior Advocate  
Nourish California

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<sup>5</sup> Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, “More Adequate SNAP Benefits Would Help Millions of Participants Better Afford Food,” July 2021: <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/more-adequate-snap-benefits-would-help-millions-of-participants-better>

<sup>6</sup> UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, 2015 California Health Interview Survey: <http://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/chis/Pages/default.aspx>. Low-income defined as households up to 200% of the federal poverty level.