

Priorities for the 2023 Farm Bill

SEPTEMBER 29, 2022

Who We Are

Nourish California is a nonprofit organization working to ensure equitable access to food. We focus our efforts on our fellow Californians who face the greatest needs and the starkest inequities. Our team leads statewide advocacy efforts to end hunger, disrupt poverty, and ensure that all Californians are well nourished and have the food they need to thrive.

Introduction

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. We have an obligation to make the next Farm Bill work for all Californians.

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 the food they need through CalFresh. As Congress drafts the next Farm Bill, it is critical that SNAP/CalFresh is strengthened by advancing equity, removing barriers to access, and improving benefit adequacy.

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.

We Envision a Farm Bill Built on the Following Principles

- Prioritize food for all, targeting improvements to nutrition assistance programs to close accessibility and benefits adequacy gaps for populations struggling with hunger.
- Center the needs of individuals with lived experience of hunger, intergenerational poverty, and systemic racism.
- Provide adequate resources for states and counties to administer nutrition assistance programs with built in flexibility to address access issues unique to the state.



Food Hardship in California

Recently, Nourish California led research, conducted in partnership with Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3), with direct input from over 1,000 community members about their experiences with hunger, economic hardship, and public programs. Our topline findings painted a stark and unsettling picture about Californian's ability to meet their basic needs, including food.

Nearly three-quarters of respondents worried about running out of money to buy food at least some of the time and three in five said they ran out of food before they had money to buy more at least some of the time. These are most acute among parents and younger respondents.

Negative experiences when applying for benefits – both discrimination and language barriers – affect the likelihood of applying in the future among those who experience them.

Access the full research findings here: [Hardship and Hope for Change. What We Heard: The Lives & Experiences of Californians in 2021.](#)

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, known in California as CalFresh) is Effective and Efficient

SNAP/CalFresh is the nation's most important and effective federal nutrition program that reduces food insecurity and poverty.¹ The program serves as the first line of defense against hunger and supports participants in buying the foods that they want and need. Positive effects of SNAP participation are demonstrated in the short and long term. For instance, studies show children with access to SNAP had better health outcomes and were more likely to finish high school than those without access.² USDA's recent Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) adjustment raised SNAP benefit allotments by \$1.20 per person per day. However, even with the TFP update, SNAP benefits are still inadequate to maintain a healthy diet, particularly for households with high non-food expenses and those that reside in areas with high costs of living, as do most households in California due to our sky-high housing costs.³

¹ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2019. Chart Book: SNAP Helps Struggling Families Put Food on the Table.

<https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/chart-book-snap-helps-struggling-families-put-food-on-the-table>

² Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2016. SNAP Works for America's Children.

<https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snap-works-for-americas-children>

³ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2022. Updated Thrifty Food Plan Helps Millions of Families Add More Healthy Foods to Their Diets.

<https://www.cbpp.org/blog/updated-thrifty-food-plan-helps-millions-of-families-add-more-healthy-foods-to-their-diet>



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. 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.

SNAP is also one of the most efficient government programs. In Federal Fiscal Year 2021, over 94 percent of all SNAP spending went toward food benefits.⁴ CalFresh is also 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 \$1.54.⁵ In 2021, SNAP households redeemed over \$11 billion in benefits throughout California, stimulating about \$17 billion in economic activity statewide.⁶

Priorities for Change: Expand and Strengthen SNAP/CalFresh

The next Farm bill should invest in federal nutrition programs, especially SNAP, to fully meet the need and better support education and health. With so many children,⁷ older adults,⁸ and immigrants⁹ experiencing hunger, policymakers should leverage key advances made during COVID-19 in order to build a hunger-free future for the prosperity of our nation.

Nourish California and our anti-hunger partners urge California's Congressional Delegation to support a Farm Bill that increases the number of people who benefit from federal nutrition

⁴ Center on Budget & Policy Priorities, SNAP Policy Basics, June 2022, available at

<https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/the-supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>

⁵ USDA Economic Research Service, "SNAP Stimulates Economic Activity During an Economic Downturn, 2021, available at

<https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap/economic-linkages>

⁶ Center on Budget & Policy Priorities, State SNAP Fact Sheets, California, April 2022, available at

https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/snap_factsheet_california.pdf

⁷ No Kid Hungry, n.d. Facts About Child Hunger in America. <https://www.nokidhungry.org/who-we-are/hunger-facts>

⁸ National Council on Aging, 2021. Get the Facts on SNAP and Senior Hunger.

<https://www.ncoa.org/article/get-the-facts-on-snap-and-senior-hunger>

⁹ Nourish California, 2022. New Brief: Food Insecurity & Poverty Among California's Undocumented Immigrants.

<https://nourishca.org/fresh/blog-category/new-brief-food-insecurity-poverty-among-californias-undocumented-immigrants/>



programs; significantly increases benefit amounts, and modernizes the redemption of benefits. More specifically, additional investments in SNAP should include the following:

Additional Investments in SNAP/CalFresh to Eliminate Access Barriers and Boost Benefits

- Boost benefits to **reflect the Low-Cost Meal Plan**, not the still inadequate Thrifty Food Plan currently used for calculating SNAP/CalFresh benefits.
- **Eliminate the cap on the SNAP/CalFresh shelter deduction** which is currently set at \$597 (\$624 beginning October 1, 2022) and doesn't reflect California's extraordinarily high housing costs.¹⁰
- **Eliminate the punitive, counterproductive three-month SNAP/CalFresh time limit** for adults who do not have dependents and are seeking full-time work.
- **Allow recipients to purchase hot and prepared food with their benefits.** This will provide dignity and choice to participants that do not have adequate facilities for safe preparation or storage of food.
- Support **equitable access to higher education** by acknowledging that the pursuit of a college degree is work. **Eliminate the work time requirements** that keep college students from accessing SNAP/CalFresh.
- **Allow individuals who are incarcerated to apply for SNAP/CalFresh within 30 days prior to their release.** Formerly incarcerated individuals are likely to experience food insecurity and the associated poverty connected to unemployment following their release¹¹. As justice-impacted persons return to the community, they must be nourished and have access to food, housing, employment and other supports to successfully transition and thrive.
- Increase access and participation among older adults by **allowing all states to implement Combined Application Projects** that streamline dual enrollment between SNAP and the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Program.
- **Increase recertification periods to 5 years for older adults and increase reporting periods to one year for all other recipients.** Elderly and disabled individuals should not

¹⁰ USDA, SNAP Annual Cost of Living Adjustment, 2023, available at

<https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/snap-fy-2023-cola-adjustments.pdf>

¹¹ Landon, Jenny. "Food Insecurity Is Rising, And Incarceration Puts Families At Risk". Prisonpolicy.Org, 2022,

<https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2021/02/10/food-insecurity/>.



have to face the burden of yearly reporting requirements, especially when they have no earned income and there are no changes expected in their financial situation.

- **Make effective COVID provisions permanent** to increase program accessibility, reduce administrative costs, and churn. Eliminate burdensome, unnecessary interview requirements, reduce paperwork, and limit red tape for applicants, participants, and program administrators. Increase effective, user-informed outreach and the ability to use benefits for online purchases.

California Must Lead by Calling for Inclusive Federal Nutrition Programs and Eligibility Regardless of Immigration Status

The United States should be the land of opportunity for the individuals and families who call it home. Yet millions are barred from receiving access to essential programs and services solely due to their immigration status. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act, passed in 1996, greatly restricted access to federal benefits for immigrants and continues to deter participation in programs that are critical to ensuring immigrants can meet their basic needs.¹²

According to a recent [report](#)¹³, 45 percent of all undocumented Californians, and 64 percent of undocumented children, are affected by food insecurity.¹⁴ The next Farm Bill should guarantee equitable access to SNAP and other nutrition programs with no exceptions or exclusions based on immigration status.

- **Remove the five-year bar** and other barriers that deny lawfully present immigrants access to federally funded services, including SNAP.
- Support state and federal efforts to **remove eligibility restrictions based on xenophobic and racist policies** that discriminate against immigrants.
- **Provide clear, consistent, and field-tested messaging** to address fears, confusion, and misinformation among immigrants about public programs, including SNAP, impacting immigration status (e.g. the public charge rule).

¹² Congressional Research Service, *PRWORA's Restrictions on Noncitizen Eligibility for Federal Public Benefits: Legal Issues*, available at <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46510>

¹³ <https://nourishca.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Food4All-FoodInsecurityBrief-April2022.pdf>

¹⁴ Nourish California & UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, *Food Insecurity Among Undocumented Immigrants in California & Exclusion from Nutrition Assistance Programs*, April 2022, available at <https://nourishca.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Food4All-FoodInsecurityBrief-April2022.pdf>



In summary, the next Farm Bill should advance bold, transformative policies that expand and strengthen federal nutrition programs; and establish an inclusive, equitable safety net open to all who call the United States home. Everyone in the United States should have the food they need and want to thrive. Our nation's long history of exclusionary, inequitable policies and government-sanctioned oppression requires a re-visioning and rebuilding of our public systems if we are to truly eliminate hunger and ensure the well being of all.

Conclusion

We urge CDFA to support these recommendations and call on our California Congressional Delegation to work to enact them for the benefit of all Californians who need help putting food on the table. Thank you for your consideration of these recommendations. Should you have any questions or wish to discuss further, please contact me at jared@nourishca.org.

Sincerely,

Jared Call
Senior Advocate
Nourish California



APPENDIX: Virtual Listening Session – Community Priorities to End Hunger and Eliminate Disparities

Nourish California held a statewide listening session on July 11, 2022, from 1:00 pm to 2:30 pm. One hundred people registered and 60-70 attended the meeting. Many community members from California expressed their opinions and shared their stories. There were three breakout sessions – Addressing the Root Causes of Hunger, Strengthening Federal Food Assistance Programs, and Improving Immigrant Access to Food Assistance Programs.

Below are some examples of the common themes and expressed priorities by community members:

Addressing the Root Causes of Hunger

1. Structural racism, discrimination, and bias affect the way people access food.

Ineligibility due to immigration status, programs that don't recognize the unique and varied needs of communities, the stigma of poverty, and other outcomes of structural oppression underlie hunger and poor health.

What we heard from community members:

- *Poverty means people consider your voice less important, you are not treated well. Hunger and poverty as a whole bring a form of disrespect and disregard.*
- *We had a mixed immigration status household with 9 children. My parents and older siblings struggled to have enough food for all of us. We also had to focus on food that was affordable and led to poor diets. We had lots of refried beans and potatoes with tortillas as it was the most cost-effective.*

2. Barriers to access for certain communities have been further exacerbated by the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated hunger for many – particularly for populations who are barred from SNAP due to their immigration status, those that struggle with their mental health, and those who are unhoused. These groups were unable to utilize the many benefits associated with SNAP participation.

What we heard from community members:



- *There are several challenges of enrolling into programs. It's especially hard for those who are unhoused -- access to the internet, the ability to navigate the system when you are dealing with mental illness, having access to a caseworker when you need it. Getting folks automatically enrolled or otherwise easing the burden and complexity of enrollment would be helpful.*
 - *There are many policies that exclude undocumented families. Children from immigrant families may grow up without access to SNAP or state-funded food assistance programs even though they qualify for free or reduced lunch at school. Parents may be afraid to look for help from the government.*
3. **SNAP must become inclusive of all individuals.** The rules for SNAP participation are not reflective of the needs of today's society. The program was intentionally designed to discriminate against members of our community who are deemed "less worthy" of benefits. Work rules for Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWD) and college students, are harmful and prevent individuals from accessing food during times when they require assistance.

What we heard from community members:

- *The ABAWD rules need to be really re-evaluated. We need to separate work requirements from SNAP benefits. We're going to see a lot of harm done if ABAWD rules come back to California.*
 - *College student hunger is a big struggle. Being away from family as a first-generation college student means not having access to adequate resources and balancing housing, food, and other costs. We need to make the temporary COVID-era college SNAP waivers permanent so that we can expand access and support students in their college education journey. Isn't being in college employment training in and of itself? Aren't people going to school to get living wage jobs? Why is there a requirement on top of that?*
4. **Immigrant populations face multiple barriers in accessing the food they need.** The types of foods offered in food pantries and food banks are not often culturally appropriate to the communities they serve. Due to fears of the previous public charge rule under the Trump administration and the current chilling effect, parents whose children are eligible for food assistance benefits do not apply to the programs.



What we heard from community members:

- *There is a lack of access to healthy food due to lack of money to buy and fear of receiving benefits due to public charge.*
- *Being full was always important to me because it would allow me to pursue the opportunities around me. Ethnic cuisine was also always a way to express my culture. To me, food is a fundamental part of who I am and what I can do. For many people, getting access to food is the first step of many to achieving the promises of the American Dream.*

5. **Public assistance programs are not adequately serving immigrant populations.** Many immigrant parents rely on their English-speaking children to help them with applications for public assistance programs. There are questions on the SNAP application that pose unique challenges to immigrants, such as the question about sponsor information. Immigrant farm workers have experienced calling their local SNAP office for assistance with the application and have been told that there were no translators or Spanish materials available.

What we heard from community members:

- *According to the LA Times, half of all immigrants in California without legal status struggle with food insecurity. Due to legal, cultural, and linguistic differences, they lack support from both government programs like food stamps and community networks in this country.*
- *There is a lot of stigma about using public assistance within our community. Fear of being singled out, or being a burden to the country, causes immigrants to not apply for benefits.*

6. **There is a lack of access to the variety of foods that people WANT to consume.** Higher cost of foods that people consider healthy and desirable, having to travel to find stores that carry culturally appropriate food, and programs not offering food that is a cultural fit are some of the barriers that keep people from accessing the food they want for themselves and their families.

What we heard from community members:



- *Providing good storage facilities to store fresh food to improve the shelf life. This will increase its availability in the market, reduce waste and also reduce the cost of getting fresh food. This will also make it affordable to low-income earners.*
- *All food should be accessible and available to everyone, it is the humane thing to do and needed for everyone to survive. California is the agricultural capital of the country and oftentimes our own farm workers cannot eat what they grow. Only a limited variety of foods are readily available. Fresh produce is often not one of them.*

Contact and More Information

To access the full listening session transcript and Nourish California White House Conference Recommendations, visit

nourishca.org/fresh/blog-category/community-priorities-to-end-hunger-and-eliminate-disparities/.

For questions related to the White House Conference on Hunger and Health Nourish California Listening Session, please contact:

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