



CalFresh Fruit and Vegetable Supplemental Benefits Program



February 24, 2026

The Honorable John Laird
Chair, Senate Budget Committee
California State Senate
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Jesse Gabriel
Chair, Assembly Budget Committee
California State Assembly
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Caroline Menjivar
Chair, Senate Budget Subcommittee 3
California State Senate
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Dr. Corey Jackson
Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee 2
California State Assembly
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Extending and expanding the CalFresh Fruit and Vegetable Supplemental Benefits Program with \$100 million in one-time funding in the FY 26-27 budget

Dear Budget Leaders:

On behalf of the 81 undersigned organizations, we respectfully request \$100 million in one-time funding in the 2026-2027 state budget to expand the CalFresh Fruit and Vegetable Supplemental Benefits Program (also known as the CalFresh Fruit and Vegetable EBT Pilot Project). **This funding would enable the program to reach 2.5 times more families in additional regions of California and run uninterrupted for the entire fiscal year, making healthy food more affordable for those in need.** Currently, the program operates at 91 grocery stores and one farmers' market, which collectively serve 67,000 CalFresh households each month. With this additional funding, the program could operate year-around without interruptions, reach 168,000 CalFresh households, and expand into areas of California that currently have no participating retailers. As part of this year's budget process, we also respectfully request that the program's January 1, 2027 sunset date be removed through enabling legislation.

In 2023, the California Department of Social Services launched the CalFresh Fruit and Vegetable EBT Pilot Project,¹ which provides CalFresh households with up to \$60 per month in instant rebates when they purchase fresh fruits and vegetables with their CalFresh benefits. The program's pilot phase ran from February 2023 – April 2024, followed by a second phase from October 2024 – January 2025. The first two phases of the program ended after available funding was fully spent down by families in need. The third phase of the program started in November 2025, just after the conclusion of the federal shutdown, and families are once again earning additional dollars when purchasing fresh fruits and vegetables at participating stores.

While the program restarting is a success, our excitement is tempered knowing that the program's return will be short-lived. Without an additional investment in the FY 2026-27 budget, the program will likely run out of funds by July 2026 and will once again have to be paused. Families need to be able to plan their budgets ahead of time and without sufficient funding for the CalFresh Fruit and Vegetable EBT Program to remain active, tens of thousands of Californians will face unnecessary instability and be left with fewer resources to put food on their tables. Our goal is to ensure that the program runs uninterrupted during FY 2026-27 and expands to reach even more CalFresh families across the state.

¹ Program information at: <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/ebt/california-fruit-vegetable-ebt-pilot-project>

According to a November 2025 survey by the Public Policy Institute of California, 30% of Californians say they or someone in their household have cut back on food to save money in the past year.² This program is essential in alleviating hardship and increasing access to healthy food for low-income Californians.³ Research has also consistently shown that similar programs, such as Double Up Food Bucks and Más Fresco, among others, effectively reduce hunger, improve health outcomes, and boost revenue for agricultural communities. Preliminary survey findings show that an overwhelming majority of survey participants are able to buy more fruits and vegetables due to this program and believe the program supports their family's health.⁴

This year, the legislature has rightly prioritized efforts to improve affordability for Californians while also shining a spotlight on food insecurity. Amid historically high food costs that continue to strain families' budgets, as well as a significant weakening of the federal food safety net due to cuts from H.R. I, this program delivers much-needed assistance in a highly effective and efficient manner.

The passage of H.R. I pushed our food and nutrition safety net to a more precarious place than ever before and will exacerbate hunger and threaten the wellbeing of California's most vulnerable. While the federal administration withholds support for critical programs that low-income Californians rely on, our state leaders can proactively step up to build a more robust safety net that ensures families across California have sufficient resources to put nutritious food on the table.

Additionally, in a time of tight budget constraints, this program is a smart investment, as it is both immensely popular among CalFresh families and efficient at delivering high impact with low overhead costs. Because the program is integrated into the state's electronic benefit transfer (EBT) system, the program offers unmatched scalability and administrative efficiency. **We estimate that 98% of the \$100 million requested would go directly to helping CalFresh participants put food on the table.** Since the program is fully operational, the money directly supports both food-insecure households and the state's agricultural economy, as many of the fruits and vegetables purchased with these funds are grown by California farmers.

We therefore respectfully request that you include a one-time allocation of \$100 million in the 2026-27 state budget to enable the program to operate uninterrupted for a full year and expand to areas of the state without participating retailers to help more Californians afford nutritious food. This program is a timely investment in reducing hunger, improving health outcomes, and supporting our agricultural economy.

If you have any questions please contact Lena Brook at Fullwell, lbrook@fullwell.us and Michelle Lee at Nourish California, michelle@nourishca.org.

Sincerely,

Fullwell, co-sponsor
Nourish California, co-sponsor

211 Humboldt
Abrazar, Inc.

² <https://www.ppic.org/publication/ppic-statewide-survey-californians-and-their-economic-well-being-november-2025/>

³ California Association of Food Banks, Food Insecurity Data, based off Northwestern University Institute for Policy Research analysis of US Census Bureau Pulse Survey data, September 2024: <https://www.cafoodbanks.org/food-insecurity-data/>

⁴ Prickett, J., Bearse, A., Alvarez, K. et al. "The CalFresh Fruit and Vegetable EBT Pilot Project: A Model for Direct Nutrition Incentive Integration for SNAP Participants in the Retail Grocery Store Setting." Health Promotion Practice. 2025;0(0). doi:10.1177/15248399251394662

Alameda County Community Food Bank
Albertsons Companies, Inc.
American Heart Association
Artega's Food Center
Blue Zones
Blue Zones Activate - Mead Valley
Blue Zones Project Coachella
Blue Zones Project Petaluma
Blue Zones Project Riverside
Blue Zones Project Tuolumne County
Bread for the World
Buen Vecino
California Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
California Alliance for Retired Americans
California Association of Food Banks
California Citrus Mutual
California Conference of Local Health Department
Nutritionists
California Farm Bureau
California Food and Farming Network
California Fresh Fruit Association
California Immigrant Policy Center
California OneCare Education Fund
California Strawberry Commission
California WIC Association
Center for Ecoliteracy
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Center for Wellness & Nutrition
Coalition of California Welfare Rights
Organizations (CCWRO)
Community Action Marin
Community Action Partnership of Orange County
Community Health Councils
County of Humboldt
Everyone's Harvest
Farm2People
Food and Agriculture Action Coalition Toward
Sovereignty
Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano
Food for People, Inc
GLIDE
Harvest Market

HealthRIGHT 360
Homey (La Ofrenda)
Hunger Action LA
Hunger Free America
Jacobs & Cushman San Diego Food Bank
Jewish Family Services of Los Angeles
Justice in Aging
Long Beach Alliance for Food and Fitness (LBAFF)
Los Angeles Community Action Network (LA
CAN)
Los Angeles Food Policy Council
Los Angeles Regional Food Bank
Mixteco/Indígena Community Organizing Project
(MICOP)
Monterey County Farm Bureau
Mother's Nutritional Center
National Association of Social Workers (NASW)
California Chapter
National Health Foundation
OK Produce
Open Heart Kitchen
Pesticide Action Network
Redwood Empire Food Bank
River City Food Bank
Roots of Change
San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative
San Diego Food System Alliance
San Diego Hunger Coalition
San Francisco Marin Food Bank
Santa Barbara County Action Network (SBCAN)
Second Harvest Food Bank Orange County
Second Harvest of Silicon Valley
Senior Services Coalition of Alameda County
SLO Food Bank
The SF Market
The Women's Building
Veggielution
Ventura County Roots for Health Coalition -
Family Kitchen
Western Center on Law and Poverty
What We All Deserve

Methodology for Calculating Funding Request

Using data provided by CDSS and OTSI, Fullwell estimates that \$100 million is required for the program to serve 2.5 times more households for 12 months (July 2026 - June 2027 ; FY 26-27). *This projection could increase or decrease as the pilot provides additional data in the coming months.*

This \$100 million request was calculated by taking the average amount of fruit and vegetable supplemental benefits CalFresh households earned in January 2026 (the most recent full month of pilot operations) and applying that average to 2.5 times more households for 12 consecutive months. This projection of increased program utilization is extrapolated from past program utilization trends:

[January 2026 Monthly Avg. Incentives Earned per Household] ×
[January 2026 Households Served] × [2.5] × 12 months = \$100,000,000 (rounded)

[\$51] * (69,000) * (2.5) * 12 = \$105,570,000

As the re-started pilot provides additional data in the coming months, Fullwell will be able to refine the projection based on a larger data set and the projection could increase or decrease.