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FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

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FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY AND HEALTH

Requested Actions:

- **Support HR 6780** (McGovern, Malliotakis, Pingree, Evans and Fitzpatrick). The bi-partisan **Medically Tailored Home-Delivered Meals Demonstration Pilot Act** to establish a four-year nationwide pilot program through Medicare at 20 hospitals across the country to provide seniors with diet-impacted diseases medically tailored meals (MTM) at their homes, building a more resilient and cost-effective health care system.
- **Support H.R. 3183/S. 1488**. The Enhance Access to SNAP Act of 2023 (EATS Act of 2023), which would help address the eligibility challenges faced by college students under SNAP, eliminating outdated restrictions (**H.R. 3183, Gomez**, co-sponsors include Matsui and Thompson; **S. 1488, Gillibrand**, co-sponsors include Butler and Padilla).
- **Support S. 2881** (Padilla). The Opportunity to Address College Hunger Act, to help eligible students access SNAP benefits.
- **Support S. 1205** (Brown) and **H.R. 2753** (Pingree). The Local Farms and Food Act, to reauthorize and improve the umbrella Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP) programs at USDA, and reauthorize impactful nutrition incentives including for Seniors' programs, GusNIP, and SNAP access at farmers markets (**H.R. 2573** co-sponsor includes Harder).
- **Support H.R. 6203** (Salinas, Panetta)/**S.2713** (Casey). Farmers Feeding America Act, to provide \$500 million annually in additional funding for The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) entitlement commodities, and additional funding for TEFAP Storage and Distribution to better support food banks.

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2024 Farm Bill Recommendations

- Increase equitable SNAP program access by eliminating or simplifying exclusionary policies:
 - Eliminate the work-time requirements that keep college students from accessing CalFresh to help meet their basic needs. Support the inclusion of H.R. 3183/S. 1488 in the 2024 Farm Bill.
 - Repeal the three-month time limit on SNAP benefits within a three-year period for certain working age adults who cannot document sufficient hours of work.
- Combine the application process and delivery of WIC, SNAP (CalFresh), and Free and Subsidized School Lunch Programs, which will increase efficiency, reduce the complexity for the recipient, and reduce overall program costs.
- Support and increase investments in nutrition and food assistance programs to address food insecurity, strengthen local and regional food systems, and increase health. Support the inclusion of H.R. 2723/S. 1205 in the Farm Bill:
 - Continue and expand funding for programs that leverage SNAP benefits to make healthy food choices, such as the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP).
 - Provide full funding for WIC (Women, Infants and Children) Special Supplemental Nutrition Program. In Sacramento County, WIC provides services to over 34,000 clients annually, with numbers increasing post-pandemic.
 - Maintain mandatory funding for the Farmers' Market and Local Food Promotion Program and increase support for local food systems, including farm to school activities.
- Improve edible food recovery capacity by providing reliable dedicated funding to certified Food Banks, with incentives for local food procurement and to employ food insecure workers.
- Support Nutrition Education, including the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education – SNAP-Ed.
- Provide resources for innovative community feeding programs such as Family Meal and Great Plates that were led by, and partnered with, independent restaurants to provide meals to vulnerable members of the community. These programs also helped keep workers in the industry employed.

Business Nexus

The California Capital Region is home to diverse and abundant agricultural assets and an innovative, valuable, and globally competitive food economy. Despite this rich abundance, food insecurity in the region - already higher than national averages in 2019 - increased dramatically during the pandemic. Levels rose even more when emergency food allotments ended in March 2023 (the "Hunger Cliff"). Moreover, as noted by the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Health, diet-related diseases are some of the leading causes of death and disability in the U.S., including obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and stroke. Overall, the pandemic exacerbated food insecurity, diet-related diseases, and health disparities.

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These conditions, along with increases in food prices and housing costs in 2023, have greatly strained the emergency food system, which also serves increased numbers of refugees from war-torn areas of the world. The number of residents served by the region's food banks increased by more than 50 percent since the start of the pandemic, with little public funding to support this increase along with securing, managing, and

distributing much higher levels of food and meals. Conditions also increased the need for CalFresh (SNAP – Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) and other food and nutrition assistance, including for hard-to-serve populations such as families with children, seniors, higher education students, and the unhoused. Higher education institutions in the region document a high level of food insecurity among students; a University of California Basic Needs survey found 33 percent of students overall experienced low and very low levels of food security in 2022, with between 56 percent and 58 percent of Hispanic and African American students having even higher rates of low food security.ⁱ

At the same time, CalFresh enrollment levels in several counties were low – between 40 and 50 percent of eligible residents, leaving thousands of residents food insecure and leaving behind more than \$146 million in revenue that could support the region's farmers, food retailers, and farmers' markets. There are major persistent structural barriers to enrollment, including complicated regulatory requirements and difficult application process. Student eligibility rules are generally archaic. Waivers during the pandemic which were effective in reaching additional eligible residents are expiring at the end of March 2024.

A wide network of regional partners – food banks, schools, hospitals, nonprofits, restaurants, grocery stores, local governments, philanthropy, businesses, volunteers, and more - mobilized during the pandemic to address the community's food and nutrition access and health needs. They have pioneered creative and proven solutions that should be invested in as we build a more equitable, health-promoting, and resilient food system.

Background

The Capital Region's recommendations to the White House on the National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health contains many examples of the innovative and collaborative ways that community partners have collaborated to provide food insecure residents with nutritious, locally grown foods, fresh and prepared, while supporting local growers and food producers to increase supply chain resiliency. They hold potential solutions to help achieve the national goal to end hunger and increase healthy eating and physical activity by 2030, "so fewer Americans experience diet-related diseases – all while reducing health disparities." UC Davis Health is a national leader in pioneering approaches for food is medicine, while also increasing local food institutional procurement. We support legislation to expand Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries' access to "food is medicine" interventions, including medically tailored meals and groceries, produce prescriptions for those

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with diet-related diseases or food insecurity, and recommendations for robust and tailored nutrition education such as incorporating culinary and nutrition education into schools.

As examples of the region's focus on critical issues of food and nutrition security, the 2024 Sacramento County Community Health Improvement Plan, a community-developed 5-year action plan, identified food access as one of the top three priorities for improved health in the county. Food security in the county is higher than the national average, with 16 percent of residents reporting low or very low food security and 25 percent of residents participating in a food assistance program. Findings from a 2023 survey of all Yolo County households administered by the Yolo Food Bank found even higher levels of self-reported food insecurity, with higher reliance on the Food Bank for monthly nutrition needs than previously known.

The temporary removal of barriers to SNAP enrollment and other programs was very effective at reducing food insecurity and hunger and improving nutrition by enabling benefits for eligible residents. Estimates of CalFresh benefits coming to California in 2022 included over \$343 million for District 1 (LaMalfa), \$140 million for District 3 (Kiley), \$190 million for District 4 (Thompson), \$236 million for District 5 (McClintock), \$336 million for District 6 (Bera), and \$338 million in District 7 (Matsui) (California Budget and Policy Center).¹ These benefits not only reduce hunger and nutrition insecurity, they also provide for a huge investment in our food economy.

Sources

- 2021 Sacramento Region Food System Action Plan, by Valley Vision. <https://www.valleyvision.org/resources/sacramento-region-food-system-action-plan-2021/>
- White House Conference – Recommendations from America's Farm to Fork Capital, Valley Vision, August 2022. <https://www.valleyvision.org/resources/wh-conference-recommendations/>
- Biden-Harris Administration National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health, the White House, September, 2022.
- American Farm Bureau Federation 2023 Farm Bill Policy Priorities
- California 2023 Farm Bill Recommendations, California Dept. of Food and Agriculture, CalEPA, CalHHS, California Natural Resources Agency, California Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency, Feb 23, 2023

¹ California Budget and Policy Center, "CalFresh Helps Millions of Californians Put Food on the Table," Monica Saucedo, April, 2023

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- University of California 2024 Farm Bill Priorities
- California Association of Food Bank, 2024 Federal Priorities, Fight Hunger in California

¹ University of California Basic Needs Survey, [citation to be added](#).