

BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES



**The Food and Agriculture
Policy Collaborative**





The Food and Agriculture Policy Collaborative (FAPC) is a partnership of national and local organizations working to promote the vision of healthy food and healthy economies through the advancement of four policy priorities:

- Protect and improve the structure, eligibility rules and benefit levels in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Increase fruit and vegetable incentive programs for SNAP participants
- Build and improve existing healthy food stores and supply chains through Healthy Food Financing Initiatives (HFFI)
- Strengthen marketing opportunities and the supply chain infrastructure that connects local farmers and ranchers with consumers.

FAPC worked with consumers, farmers, ranchers, grocers, community organizations and advocacy groups to ensure that the Agriculture Act of 2014 (the Farm Bill) includes policies and programs that ensure Americans do not go hungry, have retail options that provide access to healthy, affordable food, and that farmers can produce and market food in an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable manner. We believe a food system that serves all Americans will provide healthy food for all and support healthy economies.

This brochure includes information on United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) policies and programs that help strengthen our food economy and local communities. There are brief descriptions of key Farm Bill provisions, examples of how some of these programs are being used, and links to more in-depth resources. You can also contact the four organizations that lead the Collaborative and our regional partners. 

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

SNAP (formerly food stamps) provides low-income Americans with monthly benefits on Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards used to purchase food at authorized retailers, from traditional grocery stores to superstores to farmers' markets. SNAP has multiple positive impacts: SNAP promotes food security, lessens poverty, protects children's health and generates economic activity. It is structured to respond to changes in need, whether due to economic downturns or natural disasters. Each \$1 in federal SNAP benefits generates \$1.79 in economic activity, boosting the entire food system, from producers to truckers to grocery clerks. Nonetheless, SNAP's impacts are limited by gaps in participation and by low benefit levels, with the average allotment only \$4 a person a day. Changes in federal and state policy could address those shortcomings.



Increasing Benefit Levels

There are several ways in which low-income families can receive higher benefits for which they are eligible:

- States can help families fully claim dependent care costs and excess medical costs deductions.
- SNAP Heat and Eat – States that provide SNAP households more than \$20 per year in Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) benefits or similar energy assistance payments trigger a SNAP Standard Utility Allowance (SUA) that boosts benefits for households by an average of \$90 per month.
- A range of other state options is available that strengthen SNAP by improving the reach of federal benefits or supplementing them with state benefits.

For more information on increasing SNAP benefit levels, please visit:

www.frac.org/federal-foodnutrition-programs/snapfood-stamps/



Promoting SNAP Outreach and Nutrition Education

There is USDA funding available to help stakeholders mount SNAP outreach campaigns and offer nutrition education.

For updated information, please visit:

www.frac.org/snapfood-stamps-outreach-and-access-toolkit/

www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach

www.fns.usda.gov/snap/nutrition-education

For comprehensive information on how the SNAP program can improve nutrition and food security, please visit:

www.frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/SNAPstrategies.pdf



Protecting and Improving Healthy Food Access for SNAP Consumers: SNAP Retailer Changes, Mobile Technologies and Internet Shopping

The 2014 Farm Bill requires most SNAP authorized food retailers to pay for the equipment they use to accept SNAP payments. USDA also will write regulations that will require SNAP retailers to have scanning or product look-up systems in place and that increase the threshold on types of food stock SNAP retailers must carry. Advocates should:

- Educate SNAP retailers about the changes.
- Monitor how these changes impact food access for low-income consumers and quality of food stock.
- Prepare to comment on the USDA's draft regulations when they are issued.

The Farm Bill created pilot projects to test the feasibility and implications of use of mobile payments in SNAP and of Internet purchases with SNAP. These pilots will be conducted over the next two years and, if successful, will permit mobile payments and online shopping by 2017.



SNAP + EITC, More Money to Purchase Healthy Food: Stories of Success

In the capital of the wealthiest nation on earth, almost one in seven households faces a constant struggle against hunger. Even when families can scrape together enough, a balanced and healthy diet is often beyond their reach. D.C. Hunger Solutions works to create a hunger-free community and improve the nutrition, health, economic security and well-being of low-income District residents.

Ensuring that every eligible person benefits from SNAP is core to D.C. Hunger Solutions' work to help consumers stretch their limited food dollars and purchase healthy food. In D.C., SNAP provides low-income residents with an average of \$130 per month that can be used to buy food at grocery stores and other food retailers, including more than 40 D.C. farmers' markets.

D.C. Hunger Solutions collaborates annually with the Earned Income Tax Credit Campaign and trains 50 volunteers to conduct SNAP outreach at free tax preparation sites. This campaign provides a key opportunity to reach low-income wage earners with EITC and food stamps—two programs that combined can contribute to a family's economic security and lift households over the poverty threshold.

In 2014, D.C. Hunger Solutions pre-screened 1,113 potential SNAP applicants and assisted 236 D.C. residents in completing and submitting SNAP applications. These efforts helped working families supplement their wages with this stable source of food dollars, allowing them to dedicate more of their limited incomes to building better lives by purchasing more produce, paying other bills, reducing debt, contributing to savings or participating in training and education.

Healthy Fruit and Vegetable Incentives and More

The 2014 Farm Bill includes several programs that improve access to healthy produce for participants in federal nutrition assistance programs and for the development of resilient community food systems. These programs serve the dual purpose of increasing SNAP families' and senior citizens' access to affordable, nutritious food while simultaneously increasing markets for small and mid-sized farmers. The Farm Bill also increases funding for a program that supports communities as they build better self-reliance and food security.

Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program

The Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program provides coupons to low-income seniors that can be exchanged for fruits and vegetables from authorized farmers, farmers' markets, roadside stands and community supported agriculture programs. The goal of the program is to increase low-income seniors' access to nutritious, local foods and to aid in the expansion and development of local markets. USDA provides cash grants to state agencies, which in turn disburse coupons to low-income seniors. For more information, please visit: www.sustainableagriculture.net/publications/grassrootsguide/local-food-systems-rural-development/farmers-market-nutrition-program

NEW

Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive Program (FINI)

The Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive Program provides grant funds to organizations conducting fruit and vegetable incentive projects for SNAP participants. A new USDA program established by the 2014 Farm Bill, FINI will grant \$90 million nationwide over four years. Nonprofit organizations and government agencies may apply for the grants and must provide a \$1:\$1 funding match. Incentives must only be for fruit and vegetable purchases by SNAP participants. There is a range of grant funding levels and support for both pilot projects and multi-year programs. For more information, please visit:

www.fairfoodnetwork.org/connect/blog/food-insecurity-nutrition-incentive-grant-program-primer



Community Food Projects Program

The Community Food Projects Program provides grants for projects that promote self-sufficiency and food security in low-income communities. Projects vary in scope, ranging from community gardens to marketing and consumer cooperatives, but must involve low-income participants. Grants are awarded on a competitive basis and are intended to help nonprofit entities establish and carry out multi-purpose projects that address the alleviation of food insecurity in low-income communities. For more information, please visit: www.sustainableagriculture.net/publications/grassrootsguide/local-food-systems-rural-development/community-food-project-grants/



Parkway Foods

The shopping center on Detroit's East Jefferson corridor had sat nearly vacant since the grocery store left in 2007. While other smaller, independent grocers remained, the former grocery had been an anchor in the predominantly low-income African American neighborhood.

Healthy food access is a serious challenge in the Motor City where approximately \$178.2 million of Detroit's grocery dollars are spent outside the city.¹ In 2013, the state of Michigan and local economic development groups awarded \$1.2 million in grants and loans to redevelop the shopping center with a new Parkway Foods grocery at its center to bring more healthy food to the community, an approach similar to that shown to be effective with the Healthy Food Financing Initiative.

Parkway Foods' move to the newly renovated 47,000-square-foot store created 20 new jobs and retained 30 positions. It has also sparked the launch of four other retail stores in the development.

The new location also nearly doubled the size of its produce department, increasing access to healthy food for area residents. In alignment with the store opening, Parkway Foods piloted Michigan's statewide healthy food incentive program, Double Up Food Bucks, to address affordability and grow demand for healthy produce among its customers—more than 60% of overall store sales come from SNAP benefits.

The Double Up program at Parkway Foods ran from August to November 2014, distributing up to an additional \$20,000 for SNAP families to spend on fresh Michigan grown produce. Helping SNAP families use their benefits to buy locally grown fruits and vegetables creates more healthful diets while increasing demand for regional farmers and keeping more food dollars circulating in the local economy. Store owners look forward to integrating incentives again next season—a win for low-income families, Michigan farmers and suppliers and the local Detroit economy.

For more information about the Double Up Food Bucks program, please visit:

www.fairfoodnetwork.org/what-we-do/projects/double-up-food-bucks

¹ "Economic Analysis of Detroit's Food System," Detroit Food & Fitness Collaborative, 2014. www.gcfb.org/site/DocServer/DETROIT_book_r6_8_29_14_lowres.pdf?docID=9962



Financing for Healthy Food Projects

USDA estimates that 29.7 million people live in low-income areas more than one mile from a supermarket.² Community leaders, advocates and policymakers are working hard to turn back this tide, and over the past five years, there has been tremendous improvement in the form of innovative projects and policies such as the national Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) and other city and state efforts.³ California, Colorado, Illinois, Michigan, New Jersey, New York and Virginia, as well as Cincinnati, Washington, D.C., Detroit, Houston, New Orleans and New York City have all recently launched or are in the process of launching financing initiatives. Federal HFFI resources have been crucial to these local and state funds, providing seed capital and the credibility of secure resources from a competitive federal program.

² www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err-economic-research-report/err143.aspx

³ www.healthyfoodaccess.org/policy-efforts-and-impacts/state-and-local



NEW

Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI)

The 2014 Farm Bill formally establishes HFFI at USDA, authorizing spending of \$125 million. HFFI, a public-private partnership, brings jobs and economic development and improves access to healthy food for low-income communities across the country. Since 2011, more than \$140 million in one-time grants and loans has been distributed through HFFI, and those dollars have combined with grants, loans, federal tax incentives and investments from financial, health care, and philanthropic institutions, to enable HFFI to finance more than 100 projects in urban and rural communities. HFFI grants support a wide range of healthy food projects impacting our entire food system, including the development and expansion of grocery stores, food hubs, farmers' markets, corner stores, mobile markets, co-ops, urban farms, kitchen incubators and other healthy food retail.



HFFI is demonstrating that improving access to healthy food revitalizes local economies, creates jobs, improves health and creates a healthier food system. With continued funding, HFFI holds the promise of bringing access to healthy food for all. For more information, please visit:

www.healthyfoodaccess.org/policy-efforts-and-impacts/federal



HFFI In Action: Tohono O'odham Tribe

For the Tohono O'odham Tribe in southwestern and central Arizona, food is the foundation of health, culture, community, family and economies. And until the twentieth century, the Tohono O'odham Tribe had maintained food self-sufficiency using traditional agricultural practices. Now fewer than 200 acres of food crops are produced on the Nation, and the 22,000 residents of the 4,600-square-mile reservation have access to only one supermarket.

The grassroots community organization Tohono O'odham Community Action (TOCA) is dedicated to improving the health, cultural vitality, sustainability and economic revitalization of the Tohono O'odham Nation. TOCA has built a set of food system programs to support this culturally rich but economically poor Nation – the unemployment rate remains above 60%, the poverty rate is 41%, and it has the highest diabetes rate in the world, with more than 50% of O'odham adults suffering from the disease. This drastic increase in chronic diseases occurred as the Tohono O'odham diet shifted away from traditionally farmed and desert harvested foods to a more highly processed diet.

TOCA received a \$300,000 HFFI grant to pilot a school food service enterprise that supports healthier eating and a strong indigenous food economy by purchasing food from O'odham farmers who have completed TOCA's beginning farmer training program. TOCA's broad goal is to restore O'odham food sovereignty to create jobs, improve health and reclaim Native food traditions. The Nation spends an estimated \$70 million annually in food expenditures, of which less than 1% is captured locally.

Desert Rain Food Services will build the regional food economy by creating stable institutional markets for tribal food producers. Read more at: **www.healthyfoodaccess.org/resources/library/profile-toca**.



Investing in Local and Regional Food Systems

Investing in production, processing, distribution and other elements of the supply chain for regional food systems provides economic opportunities for small and mid-sized farms and helps farmers diversifying their production. Such investments also increase the availability and variety of fresh and healthy food for consumers in rural, urban, suburban and tribal communities across the country. The 2014 Farm Bill includes several programs that support the development of farm and community-based good food efforts around the country.

Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program

This program provides competitive grant funding to projects that market directly to consumers and to local and regional food business enterprises that aggregate, process, and distribute food products to meet market demand. Priority is given to projects serving low-income/low food access communities. For more information, please visit:

www.sustainableagriculture.net/publications/grassrootsguide/local-food-systems-rural-development/farmers-market-promotion-program/



Fall Line Farms Cooperative; Richmond, VA, Lance Cheung, USDA*

Local and Regional Food Enterprise Loan Guarantees

The Local and Regional Food Enterprise portion of the Business and Industry Guaranteed Loan Program provides federal loan guarantees to support and establish enterprises that process, distribute, aggregate, store and market foods produced either in-state or transported less than 400 miles from the origin of the product. This federal loan guarantee is available year-round and helps banks, credit unions and CDFIs provide loans to businesses that might not otherwise meet their underwriting standards. Priority is given to projects that benefit communities with limited access to affordable and healthy foods and that have a high rate of hunger, food insecurity or poverty. For more information, please visit:

www.sustainableagriculture.net/publications/grassrootsguide/local-food-systems-rural-development/local-food-enterprise-loans/



Common Market – Squash, USDA*

Farm Storage Facility Loans

On-farm storage and packing facilities are critical to help farmers meet the burgeoning demand for healthy, local food. USDA now provides very low-interest loans for farmers to build or upgrade washing and packing units and cold storage facilities. The loan program helps farmers sell into the local and regional markets and keeps their food fresh and safe prior to marketing. For more information, please visit:

www.sustainableagriculture.net/publications/grassrootsguide/credit-crop-insurance/farm-storage-facility-loans/

Value-Added Producer Grant Program

The Value-Added Producer Grant Program provides grants on a competitive basis to farmers, groups of farmers and farm co-ops to develop value-added producer-owned businesses that provide high quality food products to consumers. The grants can be used for developing business and marketing plans or to acquire working capital to operate a value-added business venture or alliance. By law, USDA prioritizes projects that increase opportunities for small- and medium-sized family farms and beginning, minority and veteran farmers. The grants play a key role in developing regional food systems. For more information, please visit: www.sustainableagriculture.net/publications/grassrootsguide/local-food-systems-rural-development/value-added-producer-grants/



*Moses Sleeper cheese, Bob Nichols, USDA**

Hendersonville Co-op

For farm and food businesses in rural areas, especially for newly evolving ones supporting local and regional food systems, difficulty in accessing a loan can be a major barrier to success. To address this issue, USDA administers the Business and Industry Guaranteed Loan (B&I) Program, which guarantees commercial loans for food and other enterprises based in or benefiting rural communities.

One such food enterprise that has overcome the challenge of access to credit through the B&I program is Hendersonville, North Carolina's Henderson Community Co-op (HCC Co-op), a grocery store and deli where, as much as possible, the produce sold is grown in-state. With a population of just over 13,000, Hendersonville is the county seat of a southwestern North Carolina rural county, a substantial portion of which is considered a "food desert" by USDA.⁴

Locally owned and operated since 1978, HCC Co-op has come a long way from its beginnings as a 15-member wholesale buying club. About 1,800 families and individuals in the area are now part of the ownership cooperative, and the Co-op has grown into a hub for groceries, produce and freshly prepared foods.

Thanks to a loan secured through the B&I program, the HCC Co-op is expanding to meet the growing demand for local food. In April 2014, HCC Co-op began construction on a new 6,000-square-foot building, which will be twice their previous square footage, and located in a more visible and high-traffic area of Hendersonville. By increasing the availability of healthy food produced locally and regionally, as well as marketing opportunities for area producers through its newly expanded space, HCC Co-op will be positioned to better address the economic and nutritional challenges of the region.

"Hunger and diet-related disease are prevalent issues in our community. With the expansion, we'll be accessible to more of our community, including our community members who are socially disadvantaged or on a tight budget," said member-owner and outreach manager Gretchen Schott Cummins. "Because of programs like B&I, the Co-op can be a mainstream presence."

⁴ www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas.aspx#.U1fwDcfl5P6



Food and Agriculture Policy Collaborative

The **Food and Agriculture Policy Collaborative** is a partnership of national and local organizations promoting a healthy food system, funded by the Convergence Partnership and other funders. The Convergence Partnership promotes equitable policies and practices that sustain healthy people and healthy places.

www.convergencepartnership.org



Stronger Together

These four principles work together to create healthy communities. They are stronger when applied together rather than apart.

- 1 Protect and Strengthen SNAP
- 2 Promote Fruit and Vegetable Incentives
- 3 Finance and Support Healthy Food Retail and Supply Chains
- 4 Support Sustainable Production for Local and Regional Markets



National Organizations

Fair Food Network works at the intersection of food systems, sustainability, and social equity to develop solutions that support farmers, strengthen local economies, and increase access to healthy food—especially in underserved communities.

www.fairfoodnetwork.org

Food Research and Action Center has been the central nonprofit leader in the fight to end hunger in the United States through improved and expanded public nutrition and anti-poverty programs since 1970.

www.frac.org

National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition is an alliance of more than 100 grassroots organizations that advocates for federal policy reform to advance the sustainability of agriculture, food systems, natural resources and rural communities.

www.sustainableagriculture.net

PolicyLink is a national research and action institute advancing economic and social equity by lifting up what works.

www.policylink.org

Local Partnerships

D.C. Hunger Solutions was founded in 2002 as an initiative of FRAC to create a hunger-free community and improve the nutrition, health, economic security and well-being of low-income District of Columbia residents.

www.dchunger.org

The Food Trust is a nonprofit founded in 1992 to make healthy food available to all by working with neighborhoods, schools, grocers, farmers and policymakers to develop a comprehensive approach that combines nutrition education and greater availability of affordable, healthy food.

www.thefoodtrust.org

Metropolitan Organizing Strategy Enabling Strength

is a faith-based and congregation-centered community organization that works on multiple social justice issues that have systematic impact on quality of life in a community.

www.mosesmi.org

The Reinvestment Fund is a national leader in rebuilding America's distressed towns and cities and does this work through the innovative use of capital and information to finance projects related to housing, community facilities, food access, commercial real estate and energy efficiency in the Mid-Atlantic.

www.trfund.com

The Southeastern African-American Farmers Organic Network (SAAFON) is a network of farmers dedicated to using sustainable growing methods and helping to build local and regional food systems.