



## Yuba County missing more than \$1M in fed benefits

By [Ben van der Meer/Appeal-Democrat](#)

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An advocacy group's report shows Yuba County misses out on about \$1.12 million annually in federal nutrition benefits, though it seems state paperwork hassles are largely to blame.

According to the report Wednesday by California Food Policy Advocates, the \$1.12 million the county doesn't get translates into a loss of \$2.01 million annual economic activity, based on every dollar in program benefits translating into \$1.79 in economic activity.

Alexis Fernandez, a nutrition policy advocate with the group, said Yuba County has recently adopted changes to boost the numbers of people receiving benefits under CalFresh, formerly known as the state's food stamp program.

"The idea is to remove as many barriers as possible," she said. "There could be a number of reasons why a county isn't getting full benefits from the program, but there are some unique barriers in California as a whole."

Yuba County's lost benefits are based on the difference between the number of county residents who are income eligible for CalFresh and the number actually receiving it, said Tia Shimada, who wrote the report.

Based on 2008 data, Yuba County has 890 residents who could be receiving federal nutrition benefits but aren't. Sutter County has 9,817, and Colusa County has 1,896. Yuba County spokesman Russ Brown said it's possible the county doesn't have everyone on benefit programs who could be, but it's also nothing new to say so.

"There's no doubt the paperwork is ponderous," he said. "At the same time, we're maximizing our participation in these programs as much as we can."

The county receives \$1.5 million to \$1.8 million in benefits monthly, he said, serving 4,800 to 5,000 households. He added the county received an award from the California Food Policy Advocates last year for having the best program access of any county in the state.

Fernandez said Yuba County officials recently allowed program participants to interview by phone rather than face to face at both the initial application and at a one-year renewal. The county also adopted a computer system allowing online applications, she said.

Both steps help increase the number of participants. Shimada said there are several other steps and checks in place to ensure allowing phone interviews, for example, doesn't result in more fraud.

During the upcoming legislative session, California Food Policy Advocates is backing bills to change state policy and increase federal nutrition dollars statewide.

Among the changes sought are elimination of fingerprinting programs, Fernandez said. Previous bills to make such changes failed, she said, usually because of financial concerns.

"We're hopeful with a new administration and with the savings we can associate with these steps," Fernandez said. "We wouldn't do it if we didn't think there was a chance we could be successful."

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