

New Analysis: Full CalFresh Participation in Santa Cruz County Would Bring an Estimated \$23.1 Million in Federal Nutrition Benefits to Local Residents

Santa Cruz County Ranks 47th out of 58 on the CalFresh Program Access Index

Even as the California economy recovers from the Great Recession, millions of Californians are struggling to meet their most basic needs, including the need for nutritious food. CalFresh, known federally as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), is the most substantial source of nutrition assistance available to low-income Californians. Unfortunately, the latest data from the United States Department of Agriculture indicate that only 57 percent of eligible Californians participate in CalFresh. As a result of this low participation rate, California loses out on an estimated \$3.5 billion in federal nutrition benefits each year, which would generate an estimated \$6.3 billion in additional economic activity.

Today, California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA) released its annual Program Access Index (PAI) and *Lost Dollars, Empty Plates* reports. The PAI provides a county-level analysis estimating CalFresh utilization among low-income individuals who are potentially eligible for benefits. Santa Cruz County ranks 47th out of 58 counties in the index, with the first-ranked county having the highest utilization relative to the number of potentially eligible individuals. The *Lost Dollars, Empty Plates* analysis examines the effects of CalFresh utilization on state and local economies. If CalFresh reached all potentially eligible individuals in Santa Cruz County, new participants would collectively receive an estimated \$23.1 million in federally funded nutrition benefits each year. Those benefits would result in \$41.4 million in additional economic activity.

Stigma, complex application processes, and confusion about program eligibility, among other factors, can contribute to low CalFresh enrollment. State and local leaders have taken important steps to bolster CalFresh access and participation by mitigating these factors. Some changes to CalFresh have been implemented statewide, such as removing the finger-imaging requirement and establishing stronger connections between CalFresh and Medi-Cal. Other changes, such as same-day service models and the use of call centers have been adopted by select counties. In an effort to ensure quality service and equitable access to CalFresh, SB 1147, introduced by Senator Mark DeSaulnier and co-sponsored by CFPA and SF-Marin Food Bank, would require that California establish statewide CalFresh performance goals and customer service standards. Additionally, the bill would require the public availability of data measures used to track progress towards meeting those goals and standards.

- To learn more about opportunities to improve CalFresh, visit: <http://cfpa.net/calfresh>
- To access CFPA's Program Access Index, which provides county-by-county estimates of CalFresh utilization among low-income communities, visit: <http://cfpa.net/pai-2014>
- To access the *Lost Dollars, Empty Plates* report, which examines the impact of CalFresh participation on California's state and local economies, visit: <http://cfpa.net/lost-dollars-empty-plates-2014>
- To access the estimated loss of federal benefits and associated economic activity in each of California's 58 counties, visit: <http://cfpa.net/lost-dollars-empty-plates-2014>

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