

For Release on February 20, 2013

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## **New Analysis Ranks Sonoma County 46th in Utilization of CalFresh; Increased CalFresh Participation Would Bring an Estimated \$45.3 Million in Federal Nutrition Benefits to Local Residents**

*Advocates, Administrators, Outreach Workers Applaud Efforts to Improve CalFresh Participation*

Today, California Food Policy Advocates released its annual Program Access Index (PAI) report, a county-level analysis estimating CalFresh utilization (formerly known as food stamps) among low-income individuals who meet select eligibility criteria. The index ranks Sonoma 46th out of California's 58 counties. The county ranked number one has the highest CalFresh utilization relative to the number of low-income individuals who meet the eligibility criteria incorporated into the index. If CalFresh reached all of these low-income individuals in Sonoma County, an estimated \$45.3 million in additional federally funded nutrition benefits would be received by local residents each year. Those benefits would result in \$81.2 million in additional economic activity.

Despite an increasing caseload, data from the United States Department of Agriculture show that California has the nation's lowest participation rate in CalFresh. Only 55 percent of eligible Californians receive CalFresh benefits. As a result, Californians miss out on an estimated \$4.7 billion in federally funded nutrition benefits each year. These benefits would generate an estimated \$8.3 billion in additional economic activity.

Stigma, misinformation about eligibility, and complicated enrollment processes all contribute to low CalFresh participation. To mitigate these challenges, California is implementing policies to reduce paperwork, maximize monthly benefit allotments, conduct outreach to the senior population, and modernize CalFresh administration. In addition, the 2014 implementation of the Affordable Care Act presents an opportunity for California to connect two critical health benefits through streamlined enrollment in Medi-Cal and CalFresh.

### Recognizing Progress

For the past 14 years, California Food Policy Advocates has sponsored the annual [CalFresh Forum](#). One goal of the forum is to honor individuals and community organizations for their efforts to improve CalFresh access and participation. Each year, inspiring individuals and organizations are nominated by their peers to receive Freshy Awards and winners are chosen by popular vote. The 2013 Freshy Award winners are:

- Former Representative Joe Baca, US House of Representatives
- DeLlora Ellis- Grant, Los Angeles Department of Social Services
- Riverside County Innovative Project Collaborative
- Pedro Toledo, Redwood Community Health Coalition
- Amanda Schultz, San Diego Hunger Coalition
- Natalie Tercero, Job Train, Menlo Park

Find CFFPA's Program Access Index, which provides a county by county estimate of CalFresh utilization among low-income communities, at <http://cfpa.net/pai-2013>.

To read 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-2013>.

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California Food Policy Advocates is a statewide policy and advocacy organization dedicated to improving the health and well-being of low income Californians by increasing their access to nutritious, affordable food.