

Frequently Asked Questions

California Fresh Pilot Program

On Thursday, September 15, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed SB 281 (Maldonado), which created the California Fresh Pilot Program. The California State Budget includes \$18.2 million to implement this new program. Here's what we know so far about this program. As implementation issues are decided, we'll add to this FAQ. Please feel free to contact Jessica Reich at CFPA for more information at jreich@cfpa.net or 415-777-4422 x129.

What's the context for the California Fresh Pilot Program?

As part of his vision for how California should respond to the obesity epidemic among children, Governor Schwarzenegger identified two starting points—getting junk food out of schools and getting healthy food in. He signed SB 281, along with bills that set nutrition standards for snack foods and beverages, at the Governor's Summit on Nutrition, Health and Obesity on September 15.

What will the California Fresh Pilot Program do?

The program will provide school districts with an extra 10 cents for fruits or vegetables served with the School Breakfast Program. The law specifies that districts must prioritize serving fresh produce to students and must spend at least 90 percent of the funds on direct purchasing costs. This funding increases state reimbursement for the School Breakfast Program by more than 70 percent.

Why are fresh fruits and vegetables prioritized?

The goal of the school nutrition programs is to make sure hungry kids get the nutrition they need to learn. Given that framework, it makes sense that California would prioritize adding fresh fruits and vegetables, which have more fiber and less sugar and salt than most canned varieties, to the School Breakfast Program. Some schools currently do an excellent job including fresh produce in their school meals, but many state that fresh produce is beyond their current budget. This funding is intended to help close that gap.

The California Fresh Pilot Program may also help improve students' eating outside of the school day. Anecdotal evidence suggests that as students eat fresh produce at school, they request that their parents purchase it at home. Not only does this help kids' diets, but it can also be a boon for the California agricultural economy.

Doesn't the law allow schools to use the funding for canned fruit?

The law, the California Fresh Pilot Program, requires school districts to use the funds for “nutritious” fruits and vegetables, with a “priority” to fresh produce. Although “canned” fruit/vegetables is neither explicitly allowed or disallowed, the underlying assumption of the law and of the Governor is clear—fresh is best.

Who's in charge of putting the prioritization on fresh fruits and vegetables in place?

The California Department of Education is in charge of administering the California Fresh Pilot Program and will establish the application process that will put the legally mandated prioritization on fresh fruits and vegetables into practice.

When will the money be available?

The law is an urgency measure, which means the funds are available immediately (and not in January, as is usually the case with new laws). The California Department of Education, as the program administrator, will determine when the first grants will be awarded.