

## Improved Access to Fruits and Vegetables: The "Healthy Purchase" Pilot Program

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### ► Issue

The 2005 Dietary Guidelines suggest that *everyone* eat more fruits and vegetables. Low-income Californians, such as food stamp recipients, face unique challenges in meeting this goal of increased produce consumption. Two major barriers often exist: access and costs. Grocers in low-income communities who accept food stamps are not required to offer fresh produce, so some food stamp recipients may have difficulty accessing fresh fruits and vegetables in their community. Even with access, cost may be an issue. First, research has shown that low-income households face higher food prices than other consumers. Second, the average food stamp benefit works out to around \$2.70 a day. Faced with limited resources and generally higher costs, food stamp recipients may be tempted to stretch their limited budgets by buying less expensive, calorie-dense, nutrient-poor foods. Food stamp families could benefit from action to make fresh produce more affordable.

### ► Need

While new guidelines are encouraging greater consumption of fruits and vegetables, many food stamp recipients face difficulties in meeting even the old five-a-day recommendation. Many mixed messages about healthy eating contribute to low fruit and vegetable consumption. The majority of food stamp recipients may need to double their intake of fresh fruits and vegetables to meet current recommendations. Increasing access, affordability, and knowledge of fruits and vegetables can help make the five-a-day recommendations a reality. To reduce cost as a barrier, the state could offer a bonus value for purchasing fresh fruits and vegetables. This action would increase food stamp recipients' purchasing power and help them better fit healthy produce into their tight grocery budgets. To improve access for food stamps in low-income communities, the state could provide incentives and technical assistance to small grocery stores to add or expand shelf space to offer fresh produce. To increase knowledge of the health benefits of consuming fruits and vegetables, the state could integrate existing nutrition education efforts such as the 5-A-Day Campaign with the "Healthy Purchase" pilot.

### ► Requests

CFPA asks that the legislature take these actions to improve the health of Californians:

Action 1: Improve Access	The legislature shall require the state Department of Health Services to develop a "Healthy Purchase" pilot program to offer grocers in low-income areas incentives and technical assistance to increase retail space for fresh produce.
Action 2: Improve Affordability	The legislature shall require the state Department of Health Services to develop a pilot program to make fresh produce more affordable to food stamp recipients by providing a bonus value for fresh produce purchases.

### ► History

In 2005, the legislature established the California Fresh Pilot Program, which – reimburses school districts that provide additional servings of fresh fruits and vegetables in school breakfasts. The state of California has demonstrated an interest in promoting consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables through programs including the Buy California Initiative and the California Five-A-Day program.

### ► Outcomes

Taking these actions will:

- **Improve health:** Research has shown that eating low-calorie foods like fruits and vegetables is linked with a lower weight. In addition, fruits and vegetables provide fiber and nutrients that prevent chronic disease.
- **Reduce long-term health costs:** California spends \$7.675 billion each year on obesity-related medical conditions. Increasing consumption of fresh produce is one proven way to improve health and reduce health costs.