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New Analysis: Increased CalFresh Participation Would Bring \$1,180,000,000 in Federal Nutrition Benefits to Los Angeles County

Los Angeles County Ranks 39th on the CalFresh Program Access Index

Today, California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA) released its annual *Lost Dollars, Empty Plates* report, a complement to the organization's recently published Program Access Index (PAI). The PAI compares CalFresh utilization to the number of potentially eligible individuals in each county. Los Angeles County ranks 39th out of 58 counties on the index (with the first-ranked county having the highest CalFresh utilization relative to potentially eligible individuals). *Lost Dollars, Empty Plates* describes the economic effects of CalFresh utilization. If CalFresh reached all potentially eligible individuals, Los Angeles County residents would receive an additional \$1,180,000,000 in federally funded benefits each year. Those benefits would result in \$2,120,000,000 of additional state and local economic activity. "At a time when nearly one quarter of California children live in poverty, and state and local budgets are as strained as ever, improving CalFresh participation is a 'win-win' that provides more support to struggling families and a needed boost to the economy," said Jared Call of California Food Policy Advocates.

CalFresh, known federally as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), is the largest source of nutrition assistance in California, helping over 2 million low-income households put food on the table. The latest data from the United States Department of Agriculture show that only 66 percent of eligible Californians are reached by CalFresh. Meanwhile, more than 4 million households in California are food insecure (unable to consistently afford enough food). Because of the low CalFresh participation rate, Californians lose out on \$2.6 billion in federal nutrition benefits each year, which would generate \$4.6 billion in additional economic activity.

Through changes in state law, California has eliminated several long-standing barriers to CalFresh participation. Low-income Californians are no longer subject to the inefficient practice of providing fingerprints for a CalFresh application and they are not disqualified from CalFresh just for owning a reliable car. The state adopted a sensible policy on income limits, which provides some flexibility for CalFresh applicants facing very high housing, child care, or health care expenses. Despite these positive steps, many barriers still prevent eligible children, adults, and seniors from participating. State and local administrators should continue to improve participation and administrative efficiency by:

- Ensuring that Medi-Cal recipients have streamlined access to CalFresh benefits;
 - Simplifying the CalFresh application process to better reach vulnerable seniors; and
 - Protecting against the loss of benefits for those who cannot meet work requirements due to high rates of unemployment and a lack of job opportunities
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- To learn more about opportunities to improve CalFresh, visit: <http://cfpa.net/calfresh>
 - To access CFPA's Program Access Index visit: <http://cfpa.net/pai-2016>
 - To access the *Lost Dollars, Empty Plates* report visit: <http://cfpa.net/lost-dollars-empty-plates-2016>

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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.