

## *Improving Food Access in California*

### **Summary**

The Advisory Group's report provides the frame work for the State of California and the California Healthy Food Financing Initiative Council (CHFFIC) to help Californians increase their access to healthy foods. The food access framework consists of farmers, distribution, retail and consumers. This report lists nine recommendations divided into four categories, which are: distribution, retail, consumer, and direct distribution. Listed below are the nine recommendations. The following pages provide a breakdown with strategies outlined in the report.

### **Recommendations**

1. Support Regional Food Hubs
2. Increase New Grocery Stores in Underserved Areas
3. Increase Healthy Food Sold at Existing Stores
4. Promote Acceptance of EBT and WIC at Farmers' Markets and Other Food Retailers
5. Increase CalFresh Participation
6. Support Farmers' market Nutrition Program Participation
7. Increase Healthy Food Incentive Programs
8. Support Healthy School Meals
9. Support Urban Agriculture

## **DISTRIBUTION**

### **1. Support Regional Food Hubs**

Regional food hubs:

- Offers buyers, such as schools, hospitals, and corner stores, the ability to purchase local food at reasonable prices
- Reduces transaction costs by providing a single point of purchase
- Supports small and mid-size growers by distributing to multiple consumers

#### Strategy

Assist to develop food hubs with the following:

- Access capital funds
- Find potential locations through the assistance of the California Department of Food & Agriculture
- Conduct outreach to farmers through existing agriculture infrastructure
- Work with regional, statewide groups and stakeholders to discuss and share information, provide support for stakeholders
- Meet to share best practices and current barriers

## **RETAIL**

### **2. Increase New Grocery stores in Underserved Areas**

New store development:

- Increases access to healthy food by bringing in full service grocery stores and decreases the distance residents have to travel to buy fruits and vegetables
- Lowers the cost of food (full service grocery stores tend to charge about 10 percent less than small corner stores)
- Spurs other types of development in the area, such as neighborhood revitalization, employment, and increased property value

#### Strategy

Assist new stores opening in underserved areas with the following:

- Facilitate access to existing federal and private funds through shared information about available grants and application procedures
- Offer similar grants and loans to grocery stores (when funding becomes available for CHFFIC)
- Encourage local governments to speed approval and permitting processes for stores offering healthy food
- Promote local governments to re-evaluate zoning and permitting requirements for grocery stores

- Determine benefit distribution cycles – develop a more frequent schedule for distributing CalFresh benefits to relieve stores in underserved communities; distribute benefits to participants at the beginning, middle or end of the month; or issue benefits on a bi-monthly schedule (Note: California distributes benefits during the first ten days of each month.)

### **3. Increase Healthy Food Sold at Existing Stores**

Healthy food at existing stores:

- Improves healthy food access in underserved communities
- Expands the variety of foods for corner stores
- Creates a sense of community by bringing healthier food closer to residents

#### Strategy

Assist existing stores with the following:

- Facilitate access to existing public and private funds for healthy corner store conversions
- Connect store owners and local governments to existing technical assistance, such as sourcing, storage, store design, display, and marketing assistance
- Link store owners with organizations offering technical assistance for store transitions (includes community based organizations, state and national networks)

## **CONSUMER**

### **4. Promote Acceptance of EBT and WIC at Farmers' Markets and Other Food Retailers**

Acceptance of EBT (Electronic Benefits Transfer) and WIC (Women, Infants, and Children):

- Increases participants' ability to pay for healthy food
- Allows participants the ease of shopping for healthy food
- Widens the variety of purchasing food for participants

#### Strategy

Promote EBT and WIC at farmers' markets and other food retailers with the following:

- Work with the California Department of Food & Agriculture's (CDFA) Inspection Services Agency by adding a question to the application asking if the new farmers' market plans to accept CalFresh under a current federal Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) number; assist farmers' market with process to accept CalFresh
- Encourage CDFA to share information regarding the available programs to assist with purchasing EBT equipment as well as technical assistance materials

- Collaborate with CDFA's Division of Inspection Services to make available application materials, communicate changes in federal regulations to make accepting CalFresh less burdensome for markets, and highlight best practices from other successful markets
- Allow WIC fruit and vegetable checks to be redeemed at farmers' markets by markets managers in a manner similar to CalFresh
- Facilitate information sharing and coordination with CDFA and the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) so that the eWIC system should be standardized across all counties

## **5. Increase CalFresh Participation**

Participating in CalFresh:

- Increases available funds to purchase healthy food
- Gives participants access to nutrition programs
- Gives residents in underserved communities additional funds, making healthy food more affordable
- Stimulates the economy (if California had a 100 percent participation rate, Californians would receive an additional \$4.9 billion in federal nutrition benefits; this would translate into \$8.7 billion worth of economic activity in California)

### Strategy

Encourage CalFresh participation with the following:

- Encourage methods to reduce enrollment time
- Remove the stigma by no longer requiring finger-imaging of participants
- Offer initial screenings by telephone, a simplified application process, and better coordination with community partners (e.g. food banks and other non-profits that provide enrollment assistance)
- Facilitate the coordination between the Department of Health Care Services (administers Medi-Cal) the Department of Social Services (administers CalFresh) to help enroll dual eligibility by adding a few questions to the application to determine CalFresh eligibility as well as to the CalFresh application for Medi-Cal

## **6. Support Farmers' Market Nutrition Program Participation**

Farmers' Market nutrition programs:

- Encourages healthy eating
- Federal program – the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program gives seniors \$20 - \$50 per calendar year to purchase fresh fruits, vegetables and cut herbs at Certified Farmers' Markets (CFMS)
- Federal program – WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program provides benefits to eligible participants to be used at farmers' markets
- Promote these underutilized programs

- Increase healthy food purchases and changes purchasing habits beyond the subsidy offered by the program among seniors and women

Strategy

Increase participation with the following:

- Facilitate the distribution of coupon booklets at CFMs rather than county offices so that participants can immediately use the coupons to purchase fruits and vegetables
- Encourage counties to do outreach to eligible participants through other county offices
- Have health clinics distribute information about the programs for seniors and WIC participants

**7. Increase Healthy Food Incentive Programs**

Incentive programs increase healthy food consumption:

- Gives CalFresh participants incentives to purchase more fruits and vegetables at CFMs; The Market Extra Five program gives CalFresh participants an additional \$5 to spend at CFMs if they spend \$10 on fruits and vegetables
- Encourages participants to try new fruits and vegetables

Strategy

Increase incentive programs with the following:

- Support the use of HFFI funding to fund yearlong incentive programs at CFMs for CalFresh participants
- Encourage CDFA's Inspection Services Division to encourage market managers to apply for federal and private funding for healthy incentive programs
- Assist CDFA to connect new grantees with existing programs
- Support incentive programs at CFMs and other healthy food retailers (when funding becomes available for CHFFIC)
- Help with program outreach and promotion

**DIRECTION DISTRIBUTION**

**8. Support Healthy School Meals**

Improve the nutrition of school meals:

- Teach children good eating habits
- Influences their families' eating habits
- Improves the student's ability to focus on school work

Strategy

Support schools with the following:

- Continue efforts to create a statewide Farm-to-Fork office with CDFA, CDPH, and the California Department of Education (CDE); coordinate and implement Farm-to-Fork programs across the State
- Support the Farm-to-Fork office to work with non-profit groups that are working to improve school lunch, including the California Farm-to-School Task Force
- Encourage the Farm-to-Fork office to outreach to both schools and farmers
- Promote the Farm-to-Fork office to help school districts fully utilize the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program and the Department of Defense Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Program
- Help improve school infrastructure to support Farm-to-School programs by using HFFI funds to include support for purchasing salad bars, kitchen modifications, and cold storage
- Collaborate with the Farm-to-Fork office to work with CDE and state legislators to devise solutions to ensure that students have sufficient time to eat (lunch periods are not funded as educational minutes)

**9. Support Urban Agriculture**

Urban agriculture:

- Produces food in or around urban areas
- Increases the amount of healthy food available in urban areas
- Reconnects city residents with food systems
- Provides low-income residents access to healthy food

Strategy

Encourage urban agriculture with the following:

- Support changes to local zoning ordinances that allow urban agriculture and community gardens
- Model after Cleveland's urban gardening district zoning code, which gives the City the ability to reserve land for garden use through zoning, permits urban gardens, permits "market garden," including the sale of produce from farmers' markets
- Support community groups to identify underutilized land that can be used for growing food so that the community can cultivate it
- Encourage CDFA, CDPH, and CDE to support school gardens and their inclusion in school programs