



Re: Farm Fresh Senior Nutrition Incentives

Dear Legislative Leaders:

Prior to the COVID-19 crisis the number of older Californians with limited, uncertain, or inconsistent access to the quality and quantity of food they need to live a healthy life

continued to grow at an alarming rate. Our current public health emergency is only hastening and exacerbating these trends. Low-income older adults need greater access to easier nutrition resources closer to home so they may safely age and stay in place. We are asking for a commitment to fund two proposals that will serve seniors in diverse situations: 1) those cooking in their homes; and 2) those who have meals prepared for them. To respond to the food access needs of seniors impacted by the COVID-19 Pandemic, we must act now and include the following budget allocations in an August Budget Revision:

- **\$5.4 million expansion of the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP);**
- **\$5 million to launch new Farm Fresh to Seniors Program**

The SFMNP has proven to be a valuable addition to the suite of programs that have helped low-income seniors' access locally-grown, seasonal produce while simultaneously supporting local small to mid-size, independent farmers selling at farmers' markets. Currently it is fully funded with federal monies and administered by the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA). The program serves low-income seniors who have household incomes of not more than 185% of the federal income guidelines. Most commonly the participants receive SFMNP check booklets at their local senior center or housing community, and then use them at a local farmers market. The goals of the program are two-fold: 1) provide low-income seniors with access to local grown food; 2) increase the domestic consumption of agricultural commodities through farmers' markets, roadside stands, and community supported agricultural programs. CDFA has repeatedly requested additional funds from USDA to meet the demand for the popular SFMNP program, but funding levels have remained flat at approximately \$750,000. This is completely inadequate to meet the demand for this program in California. On a pilot basis groups like Interfaith Sustainable Food Collaborative, Agricultural Institute of Marin and Mercy Housing have worked together to offer supplemental incentives to have a larger impact for seniors. Demand for this program increased following shelter-in-place orders in mid-March. The funds requested would serve more than 110,000 additional seniors in California, and provide extra incentives of \$60 each for up 25,000 of these. *In order to meet this moment the state should expand this shovel-ready program to expand service for seniors.*

California needs to serve its seniors by creating its own program focused on providing locally grown products to seniors who deserve healthful, local produce. The program will facilitate groups serving meals to seniors doing more to engage with local farmers and ranchers to provide seniors access to quality local food. This new program, will be based on the successful Farm to School programming which has successfully facilitated institutional purchasing of local food by school districts. In addition, the state of Rhode Island developed a successful Farm to Senior Program resulting in increased local agriculture purchases as well as increased awareness among seniors with more than 90% engaged understanding the importance of eating locally grown produce. We are asking that a Farm Fresh to Seniors Program be created at CDFA's Office of Farm to Fork in coordination with the California Department of Aging. The program would be designed to offer approximately 50 competitive grant awards of up to

\$100,000 to more than 9,000 eligible senior serving institutions in California for a duration of 1 to 2 years. Senior-serving institutions and programs including: long-term care facilities, skilled nursing facilities, home delivered meal providers and congregant meal sites will be eligible. In awarding the funds CDFA will give preference to non-profit organizations, agencies serving medically tailored meals and applicants primarily serving seniors that are low-income and/or members of underserved Black, Indigenous and People of Color communities.

We recognize the economic pressures our state is facing. More than ever we need to spend our money wisely, to respond to the food access needs of seniors impacted by the COVID-19 Pandemic. Offering fresh nutritious food to our low-income seniors through the proposed programs will not only create positive health outcomes, but also creates economic stimulus for our small and medium size farmers.

Sincerely,

Steve Schwartz, Executive Director, Interfaith Sustainable Food Collaborative
Reba Meigs, MPA, CEO, Innovative Health Solutions

Dr. John Maa, American Heart Association

Nancy McPherson, State Director, AARP, American Association of Retired Persons
Andrew Cheyne, Director of Government Affairs, CA Association of Food Banks
Michael Dimock, President, Roots of Change

Regina Banks, Director, Lutheran Office of Public Policy - California

Kari Hamerschlag, Deputy Director, Food and Agriculture, Friends of the Earth
Liana Orlandi, Chair, Marin Food Policy Council

Marchon Tatmon, Government Affairs Manager, San Francisco-Marin Food Bank
Jenalee Dawson, Social Service Coordinator, CA Human Development

Elizabeth Sholes, Policy Advocate, California Church

IMPACT Jared Call, Senior Advocate, California Food Policy Advocates

Cassidie Bates, Policy & Advocacy Manager, Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano
Nori Grossmann, Co-Chair, Bay Area Nutrition and Physical Activity Collaborative

Cathryn Couch, CEO, CERES Community Project

Alejandra Argueta, Resident Services Manager, Mercy Housing

Kathy Carver, Food Donor & Recipient Relations Manager, ExtraFood.org

Diane Barnett, Owner / Executive Director, Fremont Children's Peace

Pavilion Denice Leslie, Retired Clergy, St. James Cathedral Fresno

Cindy Arntson, Pastor, Community United Methodist Church of Julian

Rev. Kate Clayton, Reverend, San Geronimo Community Presbyterian

Church Barton Stone, Priest, Stone Creek Zen Center

Andy Naja-Riese, CEO, Agricultural Institute of Marin

Aaron Horner, Program Administrator, First Presbyterian Hayward

Judy Erickson, Program Planning & Evaluation Analyst, County of Sonoma Adult & Aging

Div. Paula Freeman, Program Support Specialist, Covia

Rev. Deborah Lee, Executive Director, Interfaith Movement for Human

Integrity Miriam Limov, Farm Institute Associate, Sierra Harvest
Father Lawrence Margitich, Pastor/Rector, St Seraphim Orthodox
Church Franco Kwan, Assistant Priest, Church of The Incarnation
Eli Gelardin, Chief Executive Officer, Marin Center for Independent
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Center Judi Shils, Founder & Director, Conscious Kitchen
Barbara Collins, Executive Director, Food of
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Lisa Craypo, Principal Consultant, Ad Lucem Consulting Maureen Williams, Resource
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Lori Sawdon, Lead Pastor, First United Methodist Church, Santa Rosa Florence Williams,
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Amanda Hixson, Food Program Director, Del Norte and Tribal Lands Community Food
Council Carle Brinkman, Food & Farming Program Director, the Ecology Center, Berkeley
Joey Smith, Founder, Let's Go Farm
Rev. Daniel Senter, Sr. Pastor, Our Saviors of Lafayette CA
Jalena Mays, Program Director, Jewish Community Center Sonoma County
Lucy A Hicks, School Nutrition Consultant, School Food and Wellness
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Paul Hepfer, Chief Executive Officer, Project Open Hand
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Christine Tran, Executive Director, Los Angeles Food Policy Council
Jeanne Parker Martin, President & CEO, LeadingAge California