SNAP Healthy Food Pricing Incentive Programs:

Best Strategies For Gaining Support At State Level

The Harkin Institute for Public Policy
& Citizen Engagement:

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Introduction

Our analysis looks at current research regarding SNAP Healthy Food Pricing Incentive Programs. These programs vary by state, with the most popular being Double Up Food Bucks, often supported by the anti-hunger nonprofit organization Fair Food Network. These programs compete through a competitive grant process to receive funding from the federal government through the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The 2014 Farm Bill established the Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) grant program, which has since been renamed the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP). While these grants go a long way in helping states implement these incentive programs, often state funding is required or necessary for the programs to continue. The Harkin Institute for Public Policy & Citizen Engagement (The Harkin Institute) developed and deployed a survey and conducted oral interviews to analyze how states support these incentive programs, including whether the state provides financial support. Through this analysis, we can provide suggestions for how to request state funds for programs in those states that do not currently provide financial support. This report also includes policy recommendations for additional sources of revenue that could support healthy food pricing incentive programs.

Data to Support Incentive Program and Policies

Data collected during this analysis revealed support for incentive programs. The Harkin Institute's analysis focused on economic impact (business growth, farm viability/coordination/use, job creation, economic development), food security (number of farmers markets participating in program, participation rates, expansion to retail stores), health outcomes (total money spent on fruits and vegetables, increased intake of fruits and vegetables), and feasibility, scalability, and acceptability based on feedback from vendors, participants, and other stakeholders. Both state-funded and non-state-funded programs contributed to positive economic impacts. On average, every dollar spent through a healthy food incentive program generated $1.60 in local economic activity. Furthermore, even though specific amounts were unable to be provided, it was clear that both state-funded and non-state funded programs increased income for local farmers.

State-funded programs were able to create jobs because organizations needed more employees to effectively administer the programs. States must provide these programs the necessary funding to generate local activity, increase farmer income, and provide jobs. In addition, incentive programs that received state funding reported higher participation rates and an increased ability to expand to more farmers' markets and retail stores. Food security is incredibly important to the state because a low level can indicate higher numbers of the homeless population and obesity rates in both adults and children.

Higher participation rates indicate that SNAP participants are adopting healthier purchasing habits, which can help refute the belief that SNAP users consume unhealthy diets. Additionally, having a greater number of participating farmers' markets and retailers in multiple seasons reduces the number of food deserts and provides year-round access to fresh fruits and vegetables. State funding is critical to help incentive programs expand so that more people have access to fresh produce. For health outcomes, participants in state-funded programs spent four times as much money on fruits and vegetables than participants in incentive programs that did not receive state funding. This indicates that more people are choosing healthier foods instead of less expensive unhealthier options.

While we were not able to provide specific numbers, it was clear that both state-funded and non-state-funded organizations saw an increase in the reported intake of fruits and vegetables. While buying more fruits and vegetables may not automatically correlate to higher consumptions, participants reported eating more fruits and vegetables than they did before the program's implementation. The most significant difference between state-funded and non-state-funded programs was whether the program had a positive influence on diet-related chronic diseases such as diabetes and obesity: Almost three times as many state-funded organizations said their program positively impacted rates of chronic disease compared to non-state-funded organizations. This is important because diet-related chronic diseases can have a significant impact on medical communities and overall community health. Individuals diagnosed with chronic disease often face an assortment of indirect costs and fees. A state appropriation would help increase consumption of fruits and vegetables and help improve health outcomes for SNAP participants.

For feasibility, scalability, and acceptability, state-funded programs were able to receive more substantial and more detailed feedback from their vendors, participants, and stakeholders. This helps resolve problems and prevent vendors, participants, and stakeholders from withdrawing from the program. State funding would allow all programs to improve their feedback process and more effectively engage with all stakeholders. If provided state funding, however, it is likely that both state-funded and non-state-funded organizations would be able to improve their feedback process and more effectively engage with their vendors, participants, and stakeholders.

Organizations that received funding from private organizations noted that private donations were unreliable and could end at any time. A state appropriation, however, would provide more reliability and give organizations more time to plan if the appropriation will not be renewed. Organizations in almost every state have tried at one point to obtain state funding, but the complexities and unpredictability of lobbying a state legislature make it difficult to obtain funding. Even programs that have been successful in obtaining state funding often must renew their request every year. This analysis revealed incentive programs have a strong impact on a state's economy, rates of food security, and overall health. But state legislatures must act now to provide funding, so these programs are not forced to shut down.

Best Practices to Receive State Funding

To have the best chance of receiving state funding, organizations should look at the practices employed by their state-funded counterparts. While all may not work for every state, non-state-funded organizations can glean over the most successful concepts and determine which may work best for them. Obtaining state funding is always an uphill battle, but these suggestions may help increase an organization's chances of receiving state funding:

- Identify legislators who are willing to manage the legislation through the legislative process.
- Build a coalition of lobbyists, advocates, and other stakeholders with the goal of passing legislation through the state government.
- Testify before the state legislature.
- Hold dinners to bring legislators together.
- Persuade legislative leadership to send any related bill to the appropriate committee.
- Educate legislators on the topic of SNAP healthy food pricing incentive programs and their success at reducing food insecurity and increasing access to fruits and vegetables.
- Ask grocers to engage with the legislators.
- Focus on political parties of legislators:
    - For Democrats, talk about the health outcomes.
    - For Republicans, talk about the program's ability to drive SNAP dollars and incentive dollars into the pockets of farmers while stimulating the local economy.
- Present a case of how state funding leverages the additional funding available through the USDA and how state and federal funding can result in the economic multiplier effect causing local economies to soar.
- Present proof of private-sector partnerships to the state government.
- Emphasize that a lack of state funding significantly lowers an organization's ability to match federal funding, creates financial uncertainty, and prevents the program from expanding to more locations.