



Hunger in California 2016 Briefing Book

WHAT EVERY CANDIDATE FOR PUBLIC OFFICE IN CALIFORNIA SHOULD KNOW ABOUT HUNGER

It is hard to believe that in 2016, one in seven Californians experiences hunger, including **one in four children**. Hunger in California is often highest in rural areas, some of which produce most of our nation's fresh fruits and vegetables. Similarly, despite our great wealth, we are home to the nation's highest poverty rate, with more than 6.3 million of our neighbors in poverty right now, especially because of California's unprecedented costs of living.

Yet fundamentally, hunger is a solvable problem, and there is a [long history](#) of [public](#) and [bipartisan support](#) that no American should go hungry.

California Association of Food Banks represents 44 food banks across our great state who in turn partner with over 6,000 local agencies to serve more than 2 million people a year. CAFB's mission is to end hunger in California. Our vision is a well-nourished and hunger-free California, where all people have enough food to lead a healthy life.

As food banks struggle to serve everyone in need, the truth is that charity alone can never solve hunger: [our public nutrition programs provide 95% of all emergency meals](#). It takes political will, and partnership with diverse sectors of business, government, non-profit, charity and others to make this vision a reality.

This booklet illustrates the magnitude of hunger and poverty in California, and our vital public safety net programs that are our first defense against hunger.

CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF FOOD BANKS

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HUNGER & POVERTY IN CALIFORNIA

One in seven Californians is experiencing hunger, including one in four children.

Hunger is consistently highest in California's rural counties where residents must cope with food deserts, higher transportation costs, and other barriers to food access.

Poverty affects nearly one in 4 Californians according to the supplemental poverty measure that accounts for our high cost of living.

Poverty rates are far higher among Latino and Black Californians.

Poverty is a source of stress and hardship with severe and permanent consequences for children including mental and physical health impacts, diminished educational and financial opportunity, and ultimately intergenerational poverty.

Nearly half of California children live in or near poverty.

California has the highest rate of senior poverty of any state. According to the Elder Index that captures elders' true cost of living, more than one-third of California seniors lack sufficient resources to maintain a healthy life.

The number of Californians who work full-time and year-round yet live in poverty has doubled since 1978. Nearly 80% of poor families in California have at least one adult working full time.

THE COST OF HUNGER IN CALIFORNIA, AMERICA'S AGRICULTURAL HEART

California produces half of our nation's fresh fruits, vegetables and nuts, helping to feed and keep communities healthy across America.

Yet California is home to 2 of the top 5 metropolitan areas suffering food hardship. Ironically, those include **Bakersfield, the hungriest city in America**, and Fresno, which produce vast agricultural bounty for the nation.

Annually, Californians miss nearly 1 billion meals. At the retail cost of food, it **would take nearly \$3 billion a year to close this missing meal gap**.

Meanwhile, up to 40% of all food grown in the U.S. is wasted. Food waste is the largest component of municipal landfills, a key source of methane emissions. **Even a 15% reduction in food waste could cut hunger in half nation-wide**.

There are severe costs to inaction as hunger and poverty put tremendous strain on our state's social and fiscal health.

Hunger-related diseases such as diabetes cost California \$37 billion annually.

Nationally, hunger and food insecurity-related diseases cost \$160 billion annually in health care expenditures.

Hospitalizations for low-income Californians spike in the 4th week of every month as food budgets are exhausted and conditions such as hypoglycemia surge.



CalFresh: Our vital safety net at work in California

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, called CalFresh in California, is our largest anti-hunger program and is our first line of defense against hunger.

CalFresh serves those most vulnerable: nearly 80 percent of CalFresh households include children and 8 percent include an elder or someone with a disability.

CalFresh provides an amazing array of benefits beyond alleviating hunger, especially for children, such as long-term improvements in health, academic performance, educational attainment, and economic self-sufficiency.

CalFresh single-handedly reduced child poverty by 4.5% in 2013.

Nationally, SNAP keeps 10 million people out of poverty and is a highly efficient and effective program.

In 2015, CalFresh provided some \$7.6 billion in federally funded food benefits to Californians. This created nearly \$14 billion in total economic activity as those dollars circulated in our economy.



Graphic: Center on Budget & Policy Priorities

Every \$1 billion in SNAP benefits results in some 14,000 jobs in states with large farming and food industries like California. This means that in 2015, CalFresh generated approximately 98,000 jobs in California.

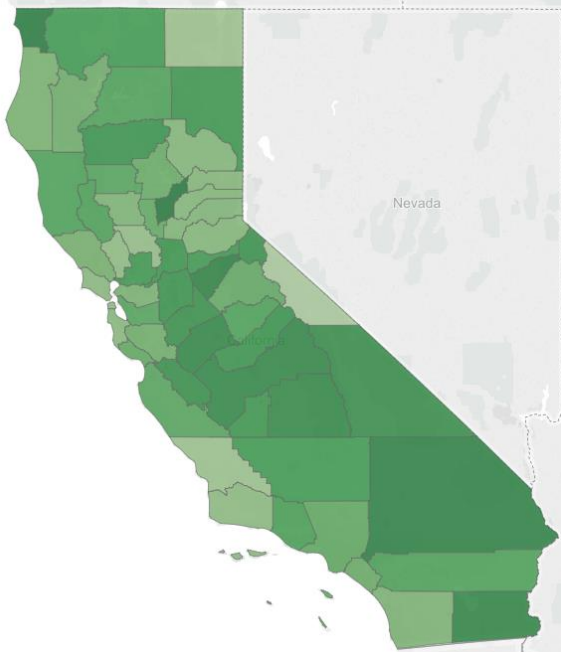
If everyone eligible for CalFresh received benefits, California would see \$2.9 billion in additional federal benefits, generating over \$5 billion in annual economic activity.

Opportunities to Strengthen & Improve CalFresh

The same research that shows the many benefits that CalFresh provides also demonstrates that assistance levels are inadequate for households to purchase sufficient, healthy foods and ultimately derive the benefits of food security.

Benefit inadequacy is starkly illustrated by the fact that one third of households who are connected to SNAP still rely on food banks for nutrition assistance.

There are several federal proposals to improve CalFresh & the SNAP program. These include using a more accurate calculation of families' food expenses to determine benefits and increasing participation while also helping those eligible remain connected to the program.



Statewide, only 66% of those eligible for benefits receive CalFresh. This ranks California 48th nationally in program participation.

Yet California has made great strides to raise program access, which USDA recognized with a bonus award.

Where a person lives in California affects her access to benefits. As the program is county administered, there is **great variation** – from 23 to 95 percent participation among those eligible in each county.

Graphic: SF-Marin Food Bank

Creating a Proportionate Response to Hunger in California

A crucial element of ending hunger in California is for our state to develop a proportionate response to the [hunger crisis facing some 5.4 million of our neighbors in need](#).

For the first time, in 2016 California devoted \$2 million in General Fund resources to the State Emergency Food Assistance Program (SEFAP). SEFAP reimburses California emergency food providers to purchase only California-grown foods

SEFAP is a crucial complement to our CalFresh program because nearly [one-third of families connected to CalFresh still visit food banks](#) as their CalFresh benefits are inadequate to last through the month.

Several of California's peer states, however, have more robust anti-hunger initiatives that provide far greater resources to those in need.

Peer State Investments in Emergency Food Assistance				
State	Annual State Emergency Food Funding ¹	Food Insecure Persons ²	Annual Expenditure Per Person	SNAP Participation Rate ³
Massachusetts	\$14.7 million	767,550	\$19.15	95%
New York	\$34.5 million	2,739,920	\$12.59	86%
Ohio	\$19.2 million	1,951,880	\$9.84	96%
Pennsylvania	\$17.8 million	1,808,660	\$9.84	90%
Washington	\$6.3 million	1,017,900	\$6.19	100%
New Jersey	\$6.8 million	1,101,750	\$6.17	76%
Texas	\$2.9 million	4,653,290	\$0.62	77%
California	\$2 million	5,401,770	\$0.37	66%

¹ Compiled from each state's EFAP funding data.

² Feeding America. Map the Meal Gap. <http://feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/hunger-studies/map-the-meal-gap.aspx>

³ USDA. State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates in 2013. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/ops/Reaching2013.pdf>

Child Nutrition Programs: Providing for California's Future

2.3 million California children depend on school meals to prevent hunger during the school year.

Yet **1.7 million - 85% - of California's low-income children** who receive free or reduced-price school meals cannot access the Summer Food Service Program.

The site-based model is an ideal situation for children, providing nutrition as well as educational enrichment and physical activity. Given the severity of summer hunger, however, USDA has tested innovative solutions to reach children in places where the site-based model can be ineffectual such as rural areas with severe transportation barriers. These solutions include providing resources directly to families to purchase food during the summer, called "Summer EBT."

Summer EBT has been shown outstanding results, reducing summer hunger among the most vulnerable children by one-third without undermining nearby meal sites.

Federal and state proposals would expand Summer EBT nationwide, including bringing the program to California.



Image: Redwood Empire Food Bank

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Policy

There are several federal proposals to improve our nutrition programs:

[Feeding America](#); [Food Research & Action Center](#)

Data

California Hunger Factsheet: [California Association of Food Banks](#)

County-level hunger data: [Feeding America](#)

Key Data Sources on California hunger & poverty: [CAFB](#)

California budget and policy resources: [California Budget & Policy Center](#)

The Reality of Hunger (data & stories): [MAZON](#)

CalFresh County Data Dashboard [California Department of Social Services](#)

CalFresh characteristics by Congressional District: [USDA](#)

CalFresh Factsheet: [Center on Budget & Policy Priorities](#)

Long Term Benefits of SNAP: [White House Council of Economic Advisors](#)



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