



NH FOOD ALLIANCE



## Nutrition Incentives: A win-win-win for families, farms, and communities in NH

- Nutrition incentives are a powerful way to increase the amount of healthy foods available to low-income families and individuals in NH while also providing an economic boost to our local farms and food businesses.
- COVID-19 has increased the risk of food insecurity for many in the state and provided new challenges for our local food providers and businesses.
- By supporting and expanding existing nutrition incentive programs in NH through new policies, funding streams, and collaborative efforts, we can improve health outcomes for vulnerable children and families and strengthen markets for NH grown food.

### What are Nutrition Incentives?

1 in 9 families in the United States benefit from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), a federally funded nutrition program that helps millions of low-income individuals and families buy groceries. (1)

The Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP, formerly FINI) supports projects to increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables among low-income consumers participating in SNAP by providing incentives at the point of purchase. (2)

Nutrition incentives double the value of fresh produce purchased by SNAP shoppers, dollar for dollar. For example, when SNAP shoppers spend \$10, they get \$20 worth of healthy, locally grown produce. (3)

## Nutrition Incentives in NH

Nutrition incentives in NH have been supported since 2015 by a combination of federal grants and private philanthropic matching funds.



Granite State Market Match (GSMM), coordinated by the NH Food Bank, offers SNAP incentives at 33 farmers' markets, benefitting 326 farms, and reaching (on average) 5000 SNAP customers in 2019.(4)

Double up Food Bucks (DUFb), an initiative led by national non-profit Fair Food Network, coordinates nutrition incentives at 14 retail stores in NH and plans to expand to at least one more in 2020. DUFb has reached about 6,680 SNAP shoppers in 2019.(5)



## Why should we support and expand these programs in NH?

### Healthy children and families

- Expanding nutrition incentives could benefit our most vulnerable populations in the state, including the nearly 1 in 9 people in NH who are food insecure in NH. (6)
- Nearly two-thirds of all SNAP participants in NH are children, elderly, and people with disabilities. (7)
- Nutrition incentives mean SNAP participants spend more dollars on healthy foods, encouraging healthy life-long eating habits. Children whose families participate in SNAP incentive programs are less likely to be in poor health or underweight and families are less likely to trade off paying for health care and paying for other basic needs like food, housing, heating, and electricity.(8)

### Thriving local farms and food businesses

- New Hampshire farmers sell \$234 million of food products per year (1989-2017 average), spending \$242 million to raise them, for an average loss of \$8 million each year.
- Meanwhile, consumers in NH spend \$4.4 billion on food each year (\$2.6 billion for home use), the majority of it produced outside the state.
- SNAP benefits totaled \$124 million in the state in 2017. If more NH residents eligible to receive SNAP benefits used those benefits to purchase locally grown fruits and vegetables, we'd see positive health impacts for our lower income communities and an economic boost for farms and rural communities. (9)

## **Strong communities and local economies**

- SNAP and nutrition incentives act as an economic engine for the state and local economy. Every \$5 spent using SNAP generates as much as \$9 in economic activity for the community. (10)
- Farmers, grocery store owners, farmer's market vendors and small retail stores all reap the benefit from higher sales of produce.
- There is room for growth! Large swaths of the state have few or no retail options available, especially for those who rely on SNAP and other federal nutrition programs. (11)

## **How do we support and expand nutrition incentive programs in NH?**

The following recommendations were developed by the NH Food Alliance Food Access Policy Team from September - February 2020. These recommendations are intended to guide NH Food Alliance network partners and allies in their collaborative efforts to ensure equitable food access for all and to support local farms and food businesses. The recommendations can also inform policy makers and planners at the municipal and state levels interested in promoting food security and a strong local food economy.

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Secure sustainable funding for Granite State Market Match (GSMM) & Double UP Food Bucks (DUFB)**

Expansion of these successful programs is limited by funding. Neighboring states support nutrition incentive programs with millions in state funding. In 2020, MA included \$6.5 Million in their state budget to support nutrition incentive programming. (12) While NH DHHS supports GSMM and DUFB administratively, there is currently no line-item funding for the programs in the annual budget.

- Stabilize annual incentive funding through state budget and institutional support.
- Assess gap in SNAP utilization bi-annually, and increase SNAP incentive budget to match this need.
- Increase collaboration between GSMM and DUFB on fundraising, program implementation and program outreach and marketing.

## **2. Expand the number of retail outlets and markets that participate in SNAP and GSMM & DUFB**

80% of SNAP benefits are spent in large grocery retail settings.<sup>(13)</sup> To reach more participants, it's critical that more outlets participate in nutrition incentives programs. In addition, it's important that there is diversity among retailers that can accept SNAP purchases so that economic benefits reach our small and independent retailers, farmers & farm stands, and cooperatives.

- Expand SNAP incentive participation to large retail chains.
- Expand SNAP & SNAP incentive participation to independent corner stores (e.g.. Healthy Corner Store Initiative).<sup>(14)</sup>
- Provide markets, retail chains, and corner stores with training, technical assistance, technology, funding, and monitoring support, to initiate and maintain SNAP incentive programs.
- Provide farmers, farm stands, food hubs and other direct-market providers of local foods with funding and technical assistance to accept SNAP purchases and participate in nutrition incentive programs. (e.g. Maine Farm Food Access Program). <sup>(15)</sup>

## **3. Address transportation barriers by bringing food to where people are**

In all parts of the state, low-income people often have difficulty accessing transportation to grocery stores and farmers markets to purchase fresh and healthy foods and take advantage of nutrition incentive programs. <sup>(16, 17)</sup> In the wake of COVID-19, transportation barriers are amplified by safety concerns and economic difficulties. <sup>(18)</sup> At the same time, innovations in online marketplaces and delivery options may make local food more accessible for some.<sup>(19)</sup>

- Support and expand Mobile Produce Markets and farm stands across the state that offer nutrition incentive programs. Seacoast Eat Local, Fresh Start Farms, and NH Food Bank have mobile markets that successfully bring local produce and SNAP incentives to places where people often have difficulty getting to farmers markets and other retail locations: elderly care facilities, workplaces, urban areas, etc.
- Identify funding for and pilot flexible models such as online ordering, pre-ordering, and delivery service options. <sup>(20)</sup>
- Offer funding to pay for delivery fees on online purchases from farmers, small businesses, or independent food retailers. <sup>(21)</sup>
- Provide funding for state agencies to deliver technical assistance to online SNAP software to small and independent retailers, farmers, and farmer cooperatives.

#### **4. Expand education and outreach efforts to support SNAP and nutrition incentive program utilization**

Lack of information about nutrition incentive programs, both for state and social service agencies as well as SNAP program participants, is a barrier to utilization. (22)

- Work with community partners and leaders to hold community listening sessions and assess program utilization and education gaps.
- Provide information and outreach materials to state agencies (e.g. DHHS, WIC, Medicaid Offices), community partners, and social service agencies about how to access SNAP and nutrition incentive programs, including mobile markets and where they are, as well as on-line ordering and delivery options.
- Ensure all outreach and educational materials are accessible for ADA, multilingual, and culturally appropriate.
- Fund and engage local community leaders to provide outreach and education about SNAP and SNAP incentive programs, including assistance with SNAP enrollment.
- Continue to support education and training around cooking and eating fresh fruits and vegetables and ensure that educational programs are inclusive of culturally diverse audiences. (e.g., Cooking Matters courses and partnerships with UNH Extension).

#### **5. Explore opportunities to expand nutrition programs that make locally grown food available to people in need who may not participate in SNAP**

There are other nutrition programs in NH that could be expanded to benefit both local farmers and low-income residents.

- Explore current utilization of USDA's Summer Food Program and support efforts that promote and expand the program where there is demonstrated need, underuse, and where there are opportunities to co-locate Summer Food Programs and source food locally.
- Support the newly created NH Feeding NH program to enable the NH Food Bank to purchase food directly from local producers for its network of pantries across the state. (23)
- Promote the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) to all eligible seniors in the state. This program provides seniors enrolled in the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) with a \$22 bundle of local fresh fruits and vegetables from July-Sept.
- Re-start the Farmers Market Nutrition Program for WIC participants in NH, utilizing the new E-WIC capability. Explore utilizing available federal funds, with minimal state investment.
- Explore partnerships with health-care institutions to expand Fruit and Vegetable Prescription programming and Food is Medicine programs across NH.
- Support funding for and expansion of Farm to School programs across the state, including funding for DOE and school districts to purchase local food for school nutrition programs.
- Utilize NH Gleans for all areas of the state or find funds to support farmers up front for their distribution to low-income, in need agencies.
- Marketing to promote school meal participation, senior meal sites, and community dinner locations.

## **6. Streamline and expand enrollment and outreach for SNAP and other food assistance programs**

Applying (and re-applying) for SNAP and other nutrition assistance benefits can be a burden and barrier to families participating in these programs. COVID-19 has both increased the need for those programs and in some cases made it more challenging for people to apply and re-enroll. (24)

- Advocate for automatic enrollment options whereby people who are enrolled in SNAP are automatically enrolled in other federally funded nutrition programs (WIC, school lunch & breakfast, etc.) through coordinated Department data sharing agreements.
- Waive or extend certification, review, reporting, and/or in person requirements to allow for greater flexibility and encourage enrollment in SNAP during the pandemic.
- Explore use of a common application portal for other federal and state benefit programs including the National School Breakfast and Lunch Programs; Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); Income Eligible Child Care; housing assistance benefits; and Cash Assistance benefits to ensure families seeking these benefits are offered simultaneous applications for SNAP and health care programs.
- Encourage inter-agency referrals under existing programs as an interim measure until a new and improved system is in place.
- Educate social workers about food assistance programs available so that they can help their families understand what they qualify for and assist them with applying.
- Maximize usage of USDA school food programs, including National School Food Lunch, School Breakfast, and Fruit and Vegetable Programs.
- Encourage school districts to adopt the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).

## **7. Expand SNAP eligibility requirements so that more working families can participate and increase monthly benefits to support families during the COVID 19 pandemic.**

In almost every recent legislative cycle, there has been an effort to limit eligibility for the SNAP program based on household income and assets. Unfortunately, these efforts would end up impacting working families - those who are working, sometimes multiple jobs, while struggling to make ends meet. SNAP provides a much needed boost for many families who otherwise need to choose between paying for rent, transportation, childcare, food and healthcare.

Today, as more families in NH are facing food insecurity and economic hardship during the pandemic, SNAP is a critical source of support for families and the local food businesses they depend on.

## Endnotes

1. [https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/a-closer-look-at-who-benefits-from-snap-state-by-state-fact-sheets#New\\_Hampshire](https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/a-closer-look-at-who-benefits-from-snap-state-by-state-fact-sheets#New_Hampshire)
2. <https://nifa.usda.gov/program/gus-schumacher-nutrition-incentive-grant-program>
3. Fitzgerald & Canepa (2017). Literature Review: SNAP Incentives. Voices for Healthy Kids. Available at: <https://voicesforhealthykids.org/assets/resources/snap-incentives-literature-review.pdf>
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8. See (3) above.
9. Meter, Ken (2019). NH Farm Fish and Food Economy. Presentation at National Family Farm Coalition, Food Solutions Forum — November 5, 2019. <http://www.crcworks.org/nhfoodforum19.pdf>
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12. <https://mafoodsystem.org/projects/HIP/>
13. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snap-boosts-retailers-and-local-economies>
14. See information re: Healthy Corner Store Initiative: <http://thefoodtrust.org/what-we-do/corner-store>
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16. See (11) above.
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19. Carson, Jessica (2020). Innovation in Food Access Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic. Carsey Perspectives. <https://scholars.unh.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1403&context=carsey>
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21. See (20) above.
22. See (17) above.
23. See <https://www.nhfoodbank.org/programs/nh-feeding-nh/>
24. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/most-states-are-using-new-flexibility-in-snap-to-respond-to-covid-19>

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