

TEAM NAME FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

Team Leaders: Brad Cecchi, Canon/Franquette Restaurants, brad@canoneastsac.com
Trish Kelly, Valley Vision, trish.kelly@valleyvision.org
Kelsey Nederveld, Sacramento City USD, Kelsey-Nederveld@scusd.edu

Issue Experts: Kelsey Nederveld, Sacramento City USD, Kelsey-Nederveld@scusd.edu
Trish Kelly, Valley Vision, trish.kelly@valleyvision.org

FOOD SYSTEM RESILIENCY AND INSTITUTIONAL PROCUREMENT

Business Nexus

As America's Farm to Fork Capital, Sacramento's vibrant agricultural economy generates billions of dollars in economic impact each year. With its renowned food and agricultural assets, the region produces a large diversity of high-quality crops and products for people at home and around the globe. A global innovator and leader in sustainable agriculture, food, and health, the region is also seeing the demand for locally sourced food growing year over year.

In spite of our great abundance, the region experiences persistent levels of food insecurity, lack of access to healthy affordable foods, and lack of equitable access to economic opportunities, all exacerbated by the pandemic. The 2021 Sacramento Region Food System Action Plan identified priorities to accelerate economic recovery and increase the resiliency of the regional food system. These include investments to strengthen institutional procurement; reduce food and nutrition insecurity, including removing barriers to federal programs; and expand food system infrastructure such as food hubs and incubators to increase farmer/producer access to new markets. The 2023 Farm Bill provides an opportunity to support region's vital food and agricultural industry as part of the California economy – the nation's largest agricultural producer and exporter.

Institutions such as schools and hospitals have purchasing power that has been greatly underestimated and are working to increase their purchasing power of locally grown foods. Each dollar spent on locally-purchased food by large institutions can generate up to an additional \$2.16 in local economic activity. Purchasing policies, regulatory constraints, limited budgets, lack of capacity, lack of adequate infrastructure such as food hubs to aggregate and deliver crops from farm to institution, and on-site facilities for storing and preparing fresh produce, are some of the long-standing barriers to local procurement. With great dedication, several institutions in the region are paving the way, providing economic benefit to both their operations and local growers while improving the quality and healthiness of food served, including to many of our most vulnerable students.

COVID-19 and the resulting disruptions in the supply chain, labor shortages and inflation has crippled school meal procurement efforts, where school food directors are unable to receive commodity (USDA Foods) allocations from processors due to shortages in their labor and freight services. Allowing the flexibility to have the option for cash in lieu of commodities would enable school districts to increase their purchasing from local growers and through direct bidding instead of purchasing commodities from out of state using USDA entitlement dollars.

Other food system resiliency issues relate to topics ranging from conservation, research and managing climate risk to ensuring equity and accessing federal agriculture programs, and strengthening the agricultural workforce. Several will be addressed in the 2023 Farm Bill and are noted below.

2023 Capitol-to-Capitol

For additional information, please contact Jack Blattner, Director of Government Affairs at (530) 219-0804 or jblattner@metrochamber.org | www.metrochamber.org

Requested Actions

Overall:

- United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) should extend to school districts the option of selecting Cash in Lieu of Commodities for use in the National School Lunch Program, just as this option is available in other federal child nutrition programs. This would expand local purchasing, open new markets for farmers and food producers, and support a resilient regional food system.
- Support development of food system infrastructures such as food hubs, central kitchens, and other facilities and equipment to increase opportunities for farm to institution procurement and increase economic benefit to local growers and the food and ag economy. This is especially an opportunity for Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC), small and economically disadvantaged farmers, and food producers. The Yolo Food Hub and the Alchemist Public Market are two shovel-ready projects that are supported by local funding and broad community partnerships.

Farm Bill:

- **Conservation programs and climate investments** provide multiple public benefits while improving agricultural production. The 2023 Farm Bill must remain committed to developing and supporting robust climate smart agriculture and conservation practices. Increase funding for working lands programs including Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and easement programs. These additional funding/resources are needed to address program backlogs and priorities.
- Support **Beginning and Historically Underserved Farmers and Ranchers**. To ensure that agricultural lands stay in production, the Farm Bill should target recruiting and supporting the next generation of farmers, including to increase equitable access to land, a high priority in the Region's Food System Action Plan.
- Ensure access for farmers to a stronger, more robust **Farm Safety Net** to mitigate the increasing impacts of climate risk, including floods, droughts, extreme heat events, catastrophic fires, and market volatility. This includes improving the Price Loss Coverage (PLC) Program to cover higher costs of production for California producers.
- **Research** is critical for many aspects of resiliency. The Farm Bill should expand USDA's participation in research and continue support for the University of California's world-class land grant university at Davis, and California State University agricultural research programs. Research is needed in areas such as weather extremes facing California producers; pesticide alternatives; agricultural technologies; and food safety research education and training to assist local and regional processing capacity.
- The Farm Bill should continue to safeguard **marketing and trade programs**, including to prioritize and increase funding and research for the **Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP)**, maintaining state flexibility in the implementation of the program. This is vital for California agriculture.
- Support rural communities. Of particular priority for our region: reauthorize and increase funding for program priorities of broadband and communications, business and community development, and support for farmworker housing. Another long-standing priority is to clarify "Rural" Definition by census tract for funding resource allocation, as our region is often "locked out."

Brief Background

Increased Institutional procurement is one of the biggest opportunities for growing the local food economy. Farm to Fork efforts tend to focus on local food purchasing by households, restaurants, retail stores, and other establishments, while overlooking the impact on local and regional food systems of institutional procurement such as by schools and hospitals. The last decade has seen an improved understanding of institutional procurement as a growing market for local foods that offer many economic, health, community, and environmental benefits. It is also a high priority for an inclusive economic and community development strategy. The region's food economy is stimulated by increasing local purchasing opportunities and healthy food access at farmers' markets, mobile markets, urban agriculture, and grocery stores. We are working on

CA CAPITOL — TO — CAPITOL DC

adding new food system infrastructure such as food hubs, public markets, and incubators that can help smaller farmers, food producers, and entrepreneurs get connected to larger markets and grow their businesses.

Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD), which prepares 45,000 meals a day and 9.3 million meals each year, has made great progress in local procurement, but is requesting greater flexibility from USDA for districts to have the option to choose cash in lieu of USDA Foods (commodities); approximately \$1.9 million, or 18% of the overall food budget for SCUSD. The USDA Foods program for schools is currently under a thorough review by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) stating, “many school districts are unable to maximize opportunities to order through USDA Foods, struggle with access to reliable deliveries or are unaware of the various options and aspects of the program.”

USDA supports and invests in Farm to School programs, stating “farm to school works to stimulate local and regional economies; improve children’s health, nutrition, and academic performance; and create widespread school and community benefits.” USDA heavily supports local procurement efforts and promotes plant-based meals; yet the USDA Foods Commodity program is full of further processed foods, and deficient with raw ingredients; particularly raw proteins. Instead of SCUSD purchasing processed chicken in Arkansas, the district wants to purchase local, raw chicken from Foster Farms, a mere 90 miles from their district schools. Purchasing the raw, local protein enables the district to process within their own central kitchen facility, and control the added ingredients; allowing for healthier protein options for its students. Allowing the choice of cash in lieu of the commodity would allow for districts like SCUSD more flexibility and local control over their food cost, and further add to the economic value in purchasing local with federal dollars. Additionally, SCUSD received the California Farm to School Incubator Grant for a second round, and \$475,000 in funds to expand its grower network, and to develop forward planting contracts with local, organic farms to grow specific produce for their school meal program. This program hopes to increase market opportunities for local growers, as the district is built-in guarantee customer for the local grower at a price that is both cost efficient for the district and advantageous for the grower. However, other procurement policies and procedures such as the USDA Foods commodity program hinder the ability of districts to procure locally grown and processed foods in the most effective and locally-driven way.

Sources: 1 2021 Sacramento Region Food System Action Plan, Valley Vision. <https://www.valleyvision.org/projects/food-system-action-plan/>

2. California 2023 Farm Bill Recommendations, California Dept. of Food and Agriculture, CalEPA, CalHHS, California Natural Resources Agency, California Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency, February 23, 2023

TEAM NAME FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

Team Leaders: Brad Cecchi, Canon/Franquette Restaurants, brad@canoneastsac.com
Trish Kelly, Valley Vision, trish.kelly@valleyvision.org
Kelsey Nederveld, Sacramento City USD, Kelsey-Nederveld@scusd.edu

Issue Experts: Trish Kelly, Valley Vision, trish.kelly@valleyvision.org
Brad Cecchi, Canon/Franquette Restaurants, brad@canoneastsac.com

FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY AND HEALTH

Business Nexus

The Greater Sacramento Region is home to diverse and abundant agricultural assets and an innovative, high-value and globally competitive food economy. Yet despite of this rich abundance, food insecurity in the region, already higher than national averages pre-pandemic, skyrocketed during the past two years. The pandemic greatly strained the emergency food system, and increased the need for CalFresh (SNAP – Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) assistance, along with other demands to reach hard-to-serve populations such as seniors, higher education students, and the unhoused. The number of residents served by the region’s food banks increased by more than 50%, with little public funding to support the dramatically increased number of clients served and food and meals stored and distributed. Almost 300,000 residents were estimated to be food insecure in 2021 – more than 12% of residents, with polling research indicating 16%. Higher education institutions such as the University of California, Davis, have documented that more than 40% of its students are food insecure, along with Sacramento State University and the region’s community colleges.

CalFresh enrollment levels in several counties were low – between 40% and 50% of eligible residents – leaving thousands of residents’ food insecure and leaving behind more than \$146 million in revenue in potential benefits that could support the region’s farmers, food retailers, and farmers markets. There are numerous persistent, structural barriers to enrollment, including complicated regulatory requirements, difficult application process, and lack of staff. Moreover, as noted by the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Health, diet-related diseases are some of the leading causes of death and disability in the U.S., including obesity, diabetes, heart disease and stroke. Overall, the pandemic exacerbated food insecurity, diet-related diseases and health disparities.

Broad and robust federal relief measures, including temporary Emergency Allotments (EAs) increasing SNAP benefits, helped reduce food insecurity and keep millions above the poverty line by the end of 2021, especially for children. However, the SNAP EAs ended in March 2023 and are increasing food hardship for many, especially given with impact of food inflation and high cost of living, including housing, in the region. It is estimated the average reduction per household monthly in California will be \$164. Other important temporary measures, such as expanded eligibility for low-income college students will end in 2023. Concurrently, food banks are seeing even more demand for services, close to a doubling of need, while contributions are lagging.

CA CAPITOL — TO — CAPITOL DC

A wide network of regional partners – food banks, schools, hospitals, nonprofits, restaurants, grocery stores, local governments, philanthropy, businesses, volunteers, and more - mobilized during the pandemic to address the community’s food and nutrition access and health needs. They have pioneered creative and proven solutions that should be invested in as we build a more equitable, health-promoting and resilient food system

Requested Actions

2023 Farm Bill Recommendations

During the pandemic, many federal changes expanded critical access to SNAP; with the end of the federal Public Health Emergency, many of these changes will end, but they have been effective and we strongly encourage that they be continued. These and other recommendations include:

- Increase equitable SNAP program access by eliminating or simplifying exclusionary policies for unique populations:
 - Reduce program access barriers for low-income college students by making the temporary COVID-19 administrative flexibilities permanent. Streamlining public access to public benefits is a critical equity strategy for colleges and universities.
 - Repeal the three-month time limit on SNAP benefits within a three-year period for certain working age adults who cannot document sufficient hours of work.
- Combine the application process and delivery of WIC, SNAP (CalFresh), and Free and Subsidized School Lunch Programs, which will increase efficiency, reduce the complexity for the recipient, and reduce overall program costs.
- Support and increase investments in nutrition and food assistance programs to address food insecurity, strengthen local/regional food systems, and increase health:
 - Continue and expand funding for programs that leverage SNAP benefits to make healthy food choices, such as the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP).
 - Maintain mandatory funding for the Farmers’ Market and Local Food Promotion Program and increase support for local food systems, including farm to school activities.
- Provide reliable dedicated funding to certified Food Banks, with incentives for local food procurement and to employ food insecure workers.
- Support Nutrition Education, including the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education – SNAP-Ed.
- Provide resources for innovative community feeding programs such as Family Meal and Great Plates that were led by and partner with independent restaurants to provide meals to vulnerable members of the community. These programs also helped keep workers in the industry employed.
- Reduce barriers to food recovery.

Additional National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health recommendations

- Support legislation to expand Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries’ access to “food is medicine” interventions, including medically tailored meals and groceries as well as produce prescriptions for those with diet-related diseases or food insecurity; fully reimburse benefits.
- Support recommendations for robust and tailored nutrition education, including incorporating culinary and nutrition education into schools.

2023 Capitol-to-Capitol

For additional information, please contact Jack Blattner, Director of Government Affairs at (530) 219-0804 or jblattner@metrochamber.org | www.metrochamber.org

CA CAPITOL — TO — CAPITOL DC

Brief Background

Since November 2022, USDA research shows that pandemic SNAP Emergency Allotments amounted to more than \$500 million per month for low-income family budgets in California, which is a huge amount to backfill, not to mention the benefit the EA provided for local growers and food producers who had lost markets during the pandemic. The temporary removal of barriers to SNAP enrollment and other programs was very effective at reducing food insecurity and hunger and improving nutrition. The region's food banks are already seeing the impacts of continued food security challenges, with the Sacramento Food Bank and Family Services showing their most recent demand for services increasing by more than 80% since the start of the pandemic.

The Sacramento Region's recommendations to the White House on the National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health contains many examples of the innovative and collaborative ways that community partners pulled together to provide food insecure residents with nutritious, locally grown foods, fresh and prepared, while supporting local growers and food producers to increase supply chain resiliency. They hold potential solutions to help achieve the national goal to end hunger and increase healthy eating and physical activity by 2030, "so fewer Americans experience diet-related diseases – all while reducing health disparities."

-
1. 2021 Sacramento Region Food System Action Plan, by Valley Vision. <https://www.valleyvision.org/resources/sacramento-region-food-system-action-plan-2021/>
 2. White House Conference – Recommendations from America's Farm to Fork Capital, Valley Vision, August 2022. <https://www.valleyvision.org/resources/wh-conference-recommendations/>
 3. Biden-Harris Administration National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health, the White House, September, 2022.
 4. Temporary Pandemic SNAP Benefits Will End in Remaining 35 States in March 2023, Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, by Dottie Rosenbaum, Katie Bergh, and Lauren Hall, February 6, 2023.
 5. "No Light at the other end": Impending loss of pandemic CalFresh boost could trigger human hunger spike, by Jeanne Kuang, CalMatters, February 9th, 2023
 6. American Farm Bureau Federation 2023 Farm Bill Policy Priorities
 7. California 2023 Farm Bill Recommendations, California Dept. of Food and Agriculture, CalEPA, CalHHS, California Natural Resources Agency, California Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency, February 23, 2023