# ACTION PLAN TO IMPROVE FOOD ACCESS IN THE CENTRAL VALLEY



cdfa
CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FOOD & AGRICULTURE

Authored by the Central Valley Food Access Working Group with support from the California Department of Food and Agriculture, Office of Farm to Fork, 2016

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Many families and individuals in the Central Valley have limited access to healthy food, despite living in the heart of one of the world's most productive agricultural regions. To address this disparity, the California Department of Food and Agriculture convened the Central Valley Food Access Working Group (Working Group) to discuss this problem, the barriers contributing to it, and make recommendations to improve food access in the Central Valley. This report outlines the process of the Working Group and details their recommendations to improve food access in the Central Valley.

The Working Group consisted of a diverse group of stakeholders, including farmers and packers, NGOs, community based organizations, local government representatives, and federal and state government representatives. After examining the barriers to food access in the Central Valley, the Working Group made recommendations broken into the following categories:

- Food with Dignity
- Food Access and Funding Resources
- Coordination and Communication
- Education and Marketing
- Job Training

Each category contains recommendations based on rationale, current barriers and challenges, and major steps for improvement.

While limited food access in the Central Valley is complex – there are many interlocking, contributing causes – the Working Group hopes these recommendations are the first step in addressing these issues and ensuring that all Central Valley residents have access to the healthy, nutritious food that the region produces.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Food with Dignity

1.1. Promote dignity as a cornerstone of any food access recommendation (page 13).

## Food Access and Funding Resources

2.1. Increase utilization of existing United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) grants and resources to promote food access (page 15).
2.2. Identify and build long-term sustainable funding models for programs supporting food access (page 17).
2.3. Collect and disseminate model language and successful examples of how land use and transportation policies can help improve food access (page 19).
2.4. Increase affordability and accessibility of Certified Farmers' Markets, particularly for rural communities, including through alternative options such as mobile markets (page 21).
2.5. Promote and support summer meal programs (page 23).
2.6. Increase participation in nutrition assistance programs (page 25).

## Coordination and Communication

3.1. Develop a web-based clearinghouse for food donation and distribution resources (page 28).

## Education and Marketing

4.1. Build relationships between schools and community organizations regarding school gardens, nutrition education, and food donation programs, by developing and sharing best practices, targeted training, and outreach (page 31).

## Job Training

5.1. Replicate successful job training programs, such as the Community Action Partnership of Kern (CAPK), and Calfresh Employment Training (e.g. Fresno County Pilot) (page 34).

# BACKGROUND

The Food Access Working Group was convened by the California Department of Food and Agriculture's (CDFA) Office of Farm to Fork with the support of CDFA's Secretary Karen Ross, to recommend actions to support improved food access in the Central Valley. [1]

The Working Group included a diverse range of stakeholders, experts and government representatives (the full list of Working Group participants is shown on Page 3). Members were drawn from a number of local communities, as well as from statewide and federal offices; participants included on-the-ground food and farm organizations, government, and non-profit representatives. Based on suggestions from members at the first meeting, CDFA sought additional participants in subsequent meetings in an effort to ensure key voices and knowledge were included in the discussions. Members brought a wide variety of perspectives, expertise, and experiences of the regional food and agricultural system to the discussion.

The Working Group's charge was to examine the food insecurity situation in the Central Valley and lay the foundation for change by developing broadly agreed-upon recommendations to ensure a better future for the region's food insecure. Working Group members were asked to fully engage and look for common ground as they worked to put together their recommendations.

The Working Group, supported by CDFA's Office of Farm to Fork and funded by a USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant, conducted its activities from October 2015 through October 2016. It developed its recommendations through work at two five-hour in-person meetings in Fresno, California and in more focused subgroup discussions conducted via conference calls and additional email communications.

At its first meeting, the Working Group discussed food insecurity in the Central Valley and looked at unmet needs and barriers to food access, as well as underutilized opportunities to improve access.

[1]For the purpose of this report, the Central Valley refers to roughly the areas encompassed by the following nine counties: Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Mariposa, Merced, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, and Tulare

Members broke into subgroups at the meetings and in later conference calls to take a closer look at barriers and opportunities, and to develop possible recommendations, both short and long-term, in the areas of:

- Access, land use, CalFresh, and funding
- Coordination, communication, policy, and food waste
- Education, job skills, and marketing

The full Working Group considered these potential recommendations at its second in-person meeting, developing a set of preliminary conclusions for each topic. These draft conclusions were refined in subsequent subgroup meetings. The Working Group, in developing the Action Plan content, looked at possible barriers to successful implementation of its recommendations, and discussed ways to overcome those barriers.

The group received facilitation and report-drafting support from the Center for Collaborative Policy at California State University, Sacramento, as well as from the Office of Farm to Fork.

Along with its work preparing this Action Plan, the Working Group's formation and meetings have allowed a number of stakeholders, interested individuals, and organizations to meet and lay the foundation for future information-sharing and mutual efforts to reduce food insecurity in the Central Valley.

# FOOD ACCESS WORKING GROUP MEMBERS

| | |
|---|---|
| Adrienne Young | California Grown |
| Andy Souza | Community Food Bank |
| Anna Martin | UCCE San Joaquin County |
| Tricia Stever Blattler | Tulare County Farm Bureau |
| Chris Tantau | Venida Packing (Exeter) |
| Genoveva Islas | Cultiva La Salud |
| Jensen Vang | Fresno Economic Opportunities Comm. Food Sys Dev Mgr |
| Jessica Medina | Fresno State Food Security Project |
| Jessica Blanchfield | Partnership for a Healthier America-Archer & Hound Advertising |
| Jill Egland | Kern Food Policy Council/United Way of Kern County |
| Judith Arroyo | San Joaquin Ag Commissioner |
| Karen Farley | CA WIC Association |
| Kimberly Chen | California Pan-Ethnic Health Network |
| Lissa Ong | USDA - FNS (WRO) |
| Lynn Figone | Ag Against Hunger |
| Mariel Mehdipour | Kern County Public Health Services, Director-Comm. Wellness |
| Mario Supnet | Stockton/San Joaquin Emergency Food Bank |
| Marisela Pineda | San Joaquin County Public Health Services |
| Martha Jue | Manager of the Fresno CDSS CalFresh Office |
| Melissa Cregan | Fresno Ag Commissioner |
| Melissa Moradian | Partnership for a Healthier America-Archer & Hound Advertising |
| Pamela McClain | Harvest Time, Merced |
| Patrice Chamberlain | Director of the California Summer Meal Coalition |
| Patricia Pinedo | Fresno County Supervisor - Henry Perera |
| Rosemarie Amaral | Fresno County Dept. of Public Health |

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|---|---|
| Sahar Shirazi | Governor's Office of Planning and Research |
| Sally Tripp | USDA - Rural Development |
| Sara Bosse | Fresno County Nutrition Education Obesity Prevention Program |
| Sarah Ramirez | FoodLink Tulare County |
| Sheila L. James | US Department of Health and Human Services |
| Shelby MacNab | UC Cooperative Extension |
| Sue Sigler | California Association of Food Banks/Farm to Family Program |
| Taylor Clanton | Kings Community Action Organization |
| Yazid Alawgarey | Community Action Partnership of Kern County |

# THE FOOD ACCESS CHALLENGE IN THE CENTRAL VALLEY

The Central Valley is one of the largest and most agriculturally productive regions in the world, yet many of its residents struggle with food insecurity and sufficient access to healthy foods – especially the fruits, vegetables, and nuts the region is known for producing. Many factors contribute to the lack of access. Additionally, food insecurity has increased, exacerbated by the recent Great Recession and California's prolonged drought. Existing efforts to improve food access in the region, including food banks, nutrition education, job training, and government programs, benefit many people across the Valley. However, despite these efforts, large portions of the population are still food insecure.

## WHO IS MOST IMPACTED

Food insecurity is found in communities across the Central Valley – from urban centers to rural areas. The cities of Fresno and Bakersfield are among the top five urban areas in the country for rates of hunger. Food insecurity increased during the Great Recession and continues to exist at high levels.

While food insecurity is prevalent throughout the Central Valley, specific populations often face higher rates of food insecurity, including children, the elderly, the homeless, and college students. For example, almost 1 in 3 children living in Fresno County is food insecure, putting Fresno in the top 10% of US Counties for child food insecurity.[2]

Food insecurity and lack of access to healthy foods – especially fruits and vegetables – are associated with an array of negative impacts including high rates of diet-related diseases, such as obesity and diabetes.

[2] Feeding America, Map the Meal Gap, 2013, available at: http://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/our-research/map-the-meal-gap/2013/map-the-meal-gap-2013-exec-summ.pdf

## CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

Despite enormous need, the Central Valley does not always receive the same attention and resources for combatting hunger as other parts of California. Foundation and non-profit dollars, as well as donations from affluent communities, tend to flow to more coastal and urban regions (primarily the Bay Area, Los Angeles, and San Diego). The Central Valley, far from these population centers, often lack visibility. Those who work on food access issues in the high density region suggest that, when the region has received attention, it has too often focused on short-term investments that failed to make a difference in a deeply entrenched situation.

The geography of poverty in the Central Valley further contributes to the lack of food access. "Food deserts," or neighborhoods without access to affordable and fresh produce, are widespread in both the poorer urban and rural areas of the Valley. Food deserts lack sufficient retail outlets or markets that can provide produce and other foods at affordable prices. Low-income residents often rely on local corner markets, which typically do not carry a substantial variety of fruits, vegetables, and other healthy foods at affordable prices. In small rural communities, where many of the Valley's agricultural workers live, population dispersion and geographic isolation compound the impacts of poverty. Travel can be lengthy and difficult, with long distances to markets and limited public transit to serve those without cars.

Additionally, the Central Valley lacks a strong infrastructure to keep local food local. While the Valley grows an incredible amount of food, most of it is packed and shipped to other parts of California, the United States, and the world. Some of that food is then processed elsewhere and returns to the Valley via retail channels, but at a higher cost that puts it out of reach for many of the area's residents.

## EXISTING EFFORTS TO IMPROVE FOOD ACCESS

Numerous policy and organizational efforts are underway to support increased food access in the Central Valley. Many food banks and non-profit organizations, rooted in the Valley, provide direct support and food to those in need. An array of federal and state programs also provide food and nutrition assistance, including the school nutrition programs, CalFresh, WIC, the state emergency food distribution program, as well as grant programs. Many of the recommendations in this Action Plan suggest ways to further leverage these existing efforts.

# RECOMMENDATIONS



# RECOMMENDED ACTIONS TO IMPROVE FOOD ACCESS IN THE CENTRAL VALLEY

The Food Access Working Group believes that improving food access in the Central Valley is a critical policy challenge that California must address. Despite the efforts of many individuals and organizations, a history of economic inequality and short-term responses continues to leave too many of the region's residents with limited access to food, particularly healthy food, such as fruits and vegetables.

The following recommendations put forward by the Food Access Working Group advance several key principles:

- Focus on long-term sustainable approaches.
- Respect the dignity of the food insecure.
- Build on existing programs and resources where possible, and increase the capacity of groups and individuals to coordinate approaches, leverage resources, and share best practices.

This section lays out the recommendations of the Food Access Working Group for addressing these challenges in the Central Valley. The discussion of each proposed action addresses:

- Recommendation: What is the recommendation?
- Rationale: What is the rationale for this recommendation? What would be the social, environmental, health, and economic benefits?
- Barriers and Challenges: What are the key challenges to implementing this action?
- Major Steps: Key steps to achieving this action.

# RECOMMENDATION 1.
# FOOD WITH DIGNITY



# RECOMMENDATION 1.1

## Promote dignity as a cornerstone of any food access recommendation

### RATIONALE

Recommendations and actions to increase access to healthy foods must recognize and promote the dignity of the individuals and communities they seek to serve. All too often, cultural attitudes and institutions (implicitly or explicitly) place blame and responsibility for hunger on individuals rather than acknowledging the impact of wider societal structures and policies. Recommendations and suggested reforms should strive to foster a system of community engagement and empowerment, rather than placing the burden of change on the most disenfranchised. It is important to ensure that future efforts acknowledge the dignity of individuals and work with communities.

### BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

- Institutional solutions often don't prioritize community engagement and empowerment or take cultural and community preferences into account.
- Many of the recommendations outlined in this Action Plan require "boots on the ground." In implementing these efforts, attention should be paid to the manner in which community members are engaged. For example, recommendations involving volunteers need to take into account the voice of community, as well as considerations of asking individuals to take on additional commitments.

### MAJOR STEPS

Ensure that Food Access Working Group members, CDFA, and other organizations and individuals working to increase food access include community engagement and empowerment in recommendations.



# RECOMMENDATION 2. FOOD ACCESS AND FUNDING RESOURCES

# RECOMMENDATION 2.1

## Increase utilization of existing USDA grants and resources to promote food access

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### RATIONALE

While USDA offers a number of grants and other resources, many are underutilized because of factors including but not limited to a lack of awareness and matching funds requirements. However, many of these grants and loans could potentially fund projects in the Central Valley that could positively impact food access. For example, USDA Rural Development offers 42 programs, including grants such as the Community Facilities Program and Rural Business Development Grants, which can support projects to increase access to specialty crops among California consumers.

### BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

- Lack of awareness is a major challenge.
- Difficult and time intensive application processes can be a barrier for potential applicants.
- Lack of resources to assist potential applicants perpetuates the problem of grant underutilization.
- Many organizations are not able to come up with sufficient matching funds that would make them eligible to apply for grants and loans that require matching funds.

### MAJOR STEPS

Short-Term:

1. Promote knowledge of USDA Grants and other resources.

Long-Term:

1. Technical assistance and establishment of public private partnerships

a. Build capacity for partnerships that can leverage resources to obtain matching funds. Encourage coordination among local agencies and other programs.

2. Awareness
    a. Promote awareness of USDA grants among potential grant recipients, including local governments and community based organizations, so that organizations working to improve food access better utilize grant opportunities.
    b. Include relevant and audience-specific information about USDA grants on CDFA website and in food access database clearinghouse to be developed (see Recommendation 3.1).
    c. Develop factsheets to highlight funding mechanisms and other programs that can be tapped to support long-term food access.
    d. Promote underutilized programs including CalFresh, summer meals, school breakfast, and additional grant programs.



# RECOMMENDATION 2.2

## Identify and build long-term sustainable funding models for programs supporting food access

## RATIONALE

Funding is a major challenge to implementing and sustaining programs that promote access to fruits, vegetables, and nuts in the Central Valley. While grants can help initiate programs, without long-term, sustained funding, these programs often disappear when the grant funding ends. There is a critical need to identify and build sources of sustainable funding to provide long-term comprehensive support for food access in the Central Valley.

## BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

- Lack of long-term, sustainable funding to support efforts that improve food access.

## MAJOR STEPS

1. Research alternative funding structures for food access programs, including the following possibilities:
    a. Developer fees (housing and commercial): e.g. local taxes used to create a Community Benefits District.
    b. Local Control Funding Formula for school-related programs
        i. California's new Local Control Funding Formula gives school districts more discretion on how they spend their funds. Districts can prioritize nutrition education, gardens, and other programs and can include funding for these programs in their plans.
    c. Social enterprise models (e.g. businesses that are self-sustaining but have a social purpose/mission)
2. Share resources, examples, and best practices of how communities have developed sustainable funding models.
    a. Methods to communicate this information will vary based on the needs of various audiences. Audiences include mid-sized organizations, non-profits, food banks, local community-based efforts, campuses and local governments including counties, cities, and school districts.

# RECOMMENDATION 2.3

## Collect and disseminate model policy language and successful examples of how land use and transportation policy can help improve food access

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## RATIONALE

Land use and transportation policy can be effective tools to promote food access. There are numerous opportunities to improve food access in municipal planning processes, such as by including health, food, and equity provisions in county general plans, general plan elements, specific plans, and area plans. General plans are also the foundation of zoning, which shape specific decisions, including where and if community gardens can be established. Information-sharing and best practices could help communities use their land use and transportation policy processes in ways that improve food access.

## BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

- Lack of awareness that land-use and transportation plans can address issues such as food access, nutrition, and public health.
- The transportation planning and engineering field does not always focus on health, nutrition, or social equity issues in planning efforts.
- Local governments may not have the resources to update and align plans or do enough public outreach and engagement during planning to bring in non-traditional planning audiences, such as those in the nutrition sector.

## MAJOR STEPS

1. Send best practices, models, or sample policy language on land-use-related food systems topics to the Governor's Office of Planning and Research, to consider for inclusion in the new edition of the General Plan Guidelines. The Guidelines are used widely as a reference by local agency planners in developing planning documents.
2. Engage county public health departments in considering addressing land-use policies in their planning.
3. Collect best practices, models, and specific planning policy language to share with local government planners throughout the Central Valley.
4. Engage food policy councils around the opportunity to use local land use planning to further nutrition and food access issues.

# RECOMMENDATION 2.4

## Increase affordability and accessibility of Certified Farmers' Markets, particularly for rural communities, including through alternative options such as mobile markets

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## RATIONALE

While Certified Farmers' Markets can be an excellent source of healthy, nutritious foods, they can be prohibitively expensive and geographically inaccessible for food insecure populations, particularly those in remote areas. Increasing the availability of more affordable produce options at Certified Farmers' Markets could increase food access. Mobile markets may be an effective way to reach farm workers and other rural residents that cannot access traditional Certified Farmers' Markets.

## BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

- Market produce is often not affordable for food insecure consumers.
- Growers need to ensure that they are receiving sufficient compensation for their produce.
- Securing sustainable funding for mobile markets can be difficult.

## MAJOR STEPS

1. Expand nutrition incentive programs that double the value of Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card purchases of fruits and vegetables at Certified Farmers' Markets. (Note: CDFA has secured state funds and is currently seeking federal funding to distribute nutrition incentives as part of the California Nutrition Incentive Program.)

2. Look to examples of mobile markets to expand access in rural areas, including both retail and free-distribution, approaches, for best practices. Possible models include those in:
    a. The Freshest Cargo mobile market in Contra Costa County
    b. The San Joaquin County Mobile Farmers' Market
    c. The Stanislaus County Free Mobile Farmers' Market
3. Look at models of more affordable certified farmers' markets to address the issue of produce
   often being cost prohibitive for low income shoppers.
4. Disseminate information about grant and other potential funding sources to support these activities.

# RECOMMENDATION 2.5

## Promote and support summer meal programs

### RATIONALE

School meals provide essential nutrition and support for many children during the school year. However, when school is out for the summer or other breaks, many students no longer have access to those nutritious meals. Many school districts and other organizations do offer meals during the summer through USDA's summer meal programs (Seamless Summer and Summer Food Service Program), but these programs are very underutilized in California and throughout the nation. Marketing campaigns and additional support can improve the provision of and participation in these summer meal programs.

### BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

- Rural communities may lack convenient sites to host summer meal programs.
- Lack of awareness of the availability of summer meals among eligible populations.
- Lack of coordination among key stakeholders.
- Policy barriers, in particular the congregant eating requirement (which requires all meals to be consumed on-site).
- The age limit (18 years) prevents parents and caregivers, as well as college students, from accessing summer meals. The age limit can also make it less likely for children to participate in summer meals, as parents are more likely to take children to summer meal sites if the whole family is able to eat together.

### MAJOR STEPS

1. Continue to coordinate with the California Summer Meal Coalition to address policy and institutional barriers and to work with local partners to implement and support summer programs.
    a. Look at ways to support Fresno's launch of a new summer meal site.
2. Partner with community-based organizations to develop county-wide marketing

and partnerships with elected officials, school districts, food banks, libraries, and Women Infants and Children (WIC) offices to coordinate services and publicize the program.

3. Develop a state-wide marketing campaign. A model is the Summer Food Florida campaign, which brands summer meal sites as places for kids to go during the summer. Ensure that all statewide marketing materials are culturally appropriate and include materials in multiple languages.
4. Work with appropriate groups to implement creative solutions in rural communities where there are not traditional congregant sites.
5. Increase utilization of WIC offices for summer meal promotion (see California WIC Association toolkit).
6. Explore possible opportunities:
    a. Look at possible synergies with programs for senior citizens, as seniors may be taking care of grandchildren; senior centers could serve as summer meal sites, and Meals on Wheels and other senior programs might be able to serve both children and seniors.
    b. Explore whether Safe Routes to School funding could be used to support transportation to summer meal sites.

# RECOMMENDATION 2.6

## Increase participation in nutrition assistance programs

## RATIONALE

There are a number of federally funded nutrition assistance programs – including CalFresh, WIC, and the Child Nutrition Programs – that increase participants' access to nutritious food, including fruits and vegetables. However, many Central Valley residents are eligible for but not enrolled in these programs. CalFresh is particularly underutilized in California – only 63% of eligible individuals actually participate in the program.[3] Similarly, only 15% of California students that participate in the National School Lunch Program participate in summer meal programs.[4] Low participation rates can be influenced by many factors – including a lack of awareness of eligibility, difficulty in enrolling, and churning (shifting eligibility status).

Increasing enrollment in CalFresh and other nutrition assistance programs are important steps in addressing food insecurity issues throughout California. Nutrition assistance programs are safety net programs that provide baseline food needs. These programs either provide nutritious food directly (e.g. school meals) or provide the means to purchase nutritious meals (e.g. CalFresh or WIC benefits).

## BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

- Many eligible individuals do not realize they are eligible for assistance.
- The process of enrolling can be confusing and time-consuming, and individuals can encounter barriers in attempting to sign up. There are insufficient resources to help people determine their eligibility and complete enrollment.

[3] USDA Food and Nutrition Service, Reaching Those in Need: Estimates of State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates in 2012, available at: http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/ops/Reaching2012.pdf

[4] Colby and Shimada, "Schools out...Who ate? A Report on Summer Nutrition in California" California Food Policy Advocates, June 2016. Available at: http://cfpa.net/ChildNutrition/Summer/CFPAPublications/SOWA-FullReport-2016.pdf

- Stigma and community acceptance can be additional barriers to enrollment.
- There is a lack of funding and resources to develop and run enrollment programs at sites catering to specific populations, such as at senior centers or on college campuses. Most college campuses do not have staff positions focused on food insecurity issues among the student body.

## MAJOR STEPS

1. Develop population-specific strategies and approaches to increase program awareness, assistance, and enrollment. Take advantage of population-focused sites, such as campuses, homeless shelters, and senior centers.
    a. For example, college campuses offer an opportunity to improve food access by increasing enrollment in CalFresh and WIC. California State University, Chico, has had compelling success with its approach, enrolling 700 students in a single semester. California State University, Humboldt also has a successful program, which includes peer-to-peer outreach. These approaches benefit not only food insecure college students, but also often the young children of these students. Building on the Chico State and Humboldt State models could help increase food access for college students in the Central Valley.
2. Collect and share examples and best practices, including:
    a. Chico State CalFresh program
    b. Humboldt State CalFresh program
    c. The Single Stop program in New York City, which screens people for eligibility to all state and federal programs, including health insurance (singlestopusa.org).
    d. Leah's Pantry in San Francisco, which houses eatfresh.org, a user-friendly nutrition and enrollment resource for community-based organizations and individuals (www.leahspantrysf.org, eatfresh.org). Information and resources are available for homeless populations, refugees, and others.
    e. The Administration for Community Living has resources on nutrition for senior citizens.
    f. Food Banks' outreach work to increase enrollment in CalFresh.
3. Identify funding resources for eligibility assistance and outreach.
4. Conduct outreach and marketing to build awareness about underutilized programs, and the availability of tools such as mybenefitscalwin.org.
5. Increase the capacity of organizations to assist food-insecure populations with eligibility for various assistance programs.



# PART 3. COORDINATION AND COMMUNICATION

# RECOMMENDATION 3.1

## Develop a web-based clearinghouse for food donation and distribution resources

The clearinghouse would:

- Focus on increasing food donations by farmers, packers, and distributors.
- Be developed following an initial inventory and assessment of existing resources, data, and case studies.
- Address concerns including scale, volume, direct contact information, and food safety (e.g. cold storage capacity).
- Provide examples and case studies for different types of donors and consumers, including growers, individuals, food banks and pantries, and gleaners.
- Aim to serve growers, distributers, food banks, and food pantries.

## RATIONALE

Food banks and food pantries are important links in the emergency food system and provide food to individuals and families in times of crisis. While food banks buy and receive donated products from many different sources, farmers have always been key partners. Donations of farm fresh produce to food banks can greatly increase access to fruits and vegetables for food bank clients. Farmers donate food for many reasons – supporting their communities, finding a beneficial use for excess or cosmetically imperfect products, etc. However, it can be challenging for growers and others to donate produce to food banks or other receivers. Key barriers include lack of contact information, lack of knowledge about tax incentives, and scale difficulties, i.e., matching the volume of donated produce to appropriate receivers, and infrastructure (e.g. cold storage capacity).

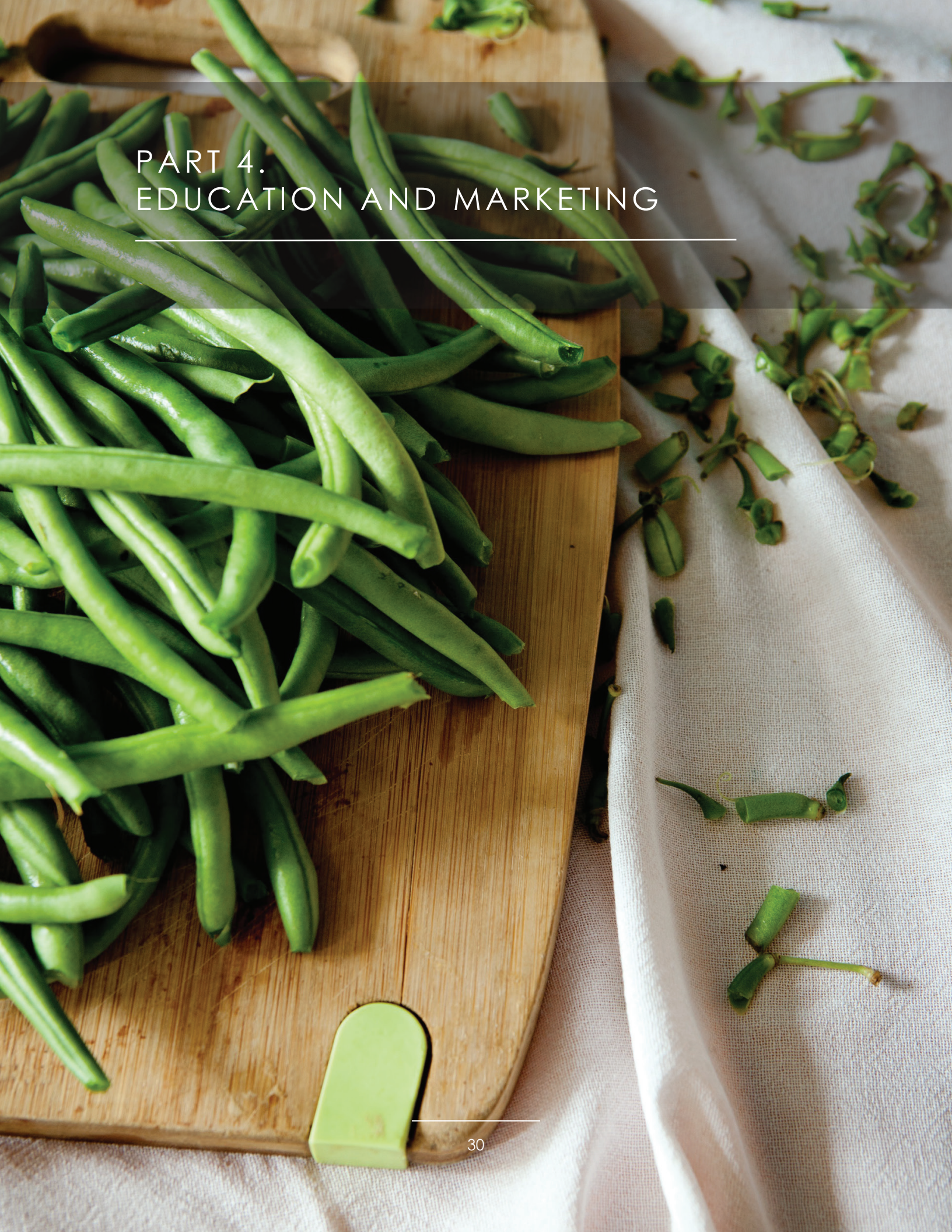
The proposed web-based clearinghouse would provide a central location for helping growers and others find the key information they need. The clearinghouse would positively impact food access by improving efficiency, ease, and awareness about food donations. Doing so will also help to reduce food waste by helping growers and others, including institutions, donate excess or cosmetically imperfect produce.

## BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

- Data and information needs to stay current and relevant, which involves time, dedicated staff, and funding.
- Misperceptions, such as the idea that donating excess produce will reduce grower profits by deflating the price of commodities or food safety concerns.

## MAJOR STEPS

1. Identify funding sources.
2. Determine who will own and maintain the website.
3. Conduct an assessment and inventory of existing resources, models, and case studies; include information on relevant laws (Good Samaritan Laws regarding food safety liability and donations; state and federal tax credits, etc.)
4. Build and maintain the online clearinghouse.
5. In partnership with CDFA, agricultural commissioners, farm bureaus, the California Association of Food Banks and others, develop and conduct an outreach strategy to reach potential donors.



# PART 4.
# EDUCATION AND MARKETING

# RECOMMENDATION 4.1

## Build relationships between schools and community organizations regarding school gardens, nutrition education, and food donation programs, by developing and sharing best practices, targeted training, and outreach

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## RATIONALE

As institutions that serve populations across the Central Valley, including the most needy, schools can be a major force in improving food access and nutrition education. Already, schools provide meals to students through the federal child nutrition programs (including school lunch, breakfast, afterschool snack and supper). By partnering with schools, community based organizations and other public entities (food banks, public health departments, etc.) can reach students and provide services ranging from nutrition education to food donations (e.g. through a backpack program where students are sent home with a backpack of food for the weekend).

However, working with schools on nutrition education, school garden, and food donation programs can be challenging for a variety of reasons. Schools are subject to many regulations - regarding curriculum and institutional time to the meal programs - and do not always have the flexibility or capacity to take on additional work. External groups are not always aware of these constraints and can find it difficult to work with schools to schedule and conduct nutrition education programs. These programs can also be expensive, especially in rural areas where more travel is required. Additionally, some schools decline school garden programs or do not allow students to prepare or eat school garden produce, because of concerns about liability and lack (or perceived lack) of approval from the county environmental health department. Schools are also often wary to take on gardens if long-term support and funding are not available or in question.

Despite these challenges, many successful examples exist. Sharing of best practices and targeted information-sharing and dialogues with school representatives and external organizations on these issues can help overcome institutional barriers and expand school garden, nutrition education, and other food access programs in schools. Strategically working with children's health advocates, including school nurses, may also help promote positive change in schools.

## BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

- Regulations regarding the use of school garden produce in schools varies from county to county (depending on the county environmental health department).
- There are not many long-term, sustainable funding options for many of these programs.

## MAJOR STEPS

1. Promote sustainable funding models, including Local Control Funding Formula, as potential options for sustaining nutrition education programs within schools.
2. Share resources and develop case studies that focus on process, i.e., how organizations have institutional barriers and have successfully instituted school gardens and other programs. A successful example is Grimmway Charter School in Kern County.
3. Pursue opportunities for learning, dialogue, and workshopping between schools (including food services directors). CDFA incorporated a school garden component into Child Nutrition Director trainings for food service directors during three 2017 trainings.



# PART 5.
# JOB TRAINING

# RECOMMENDATION 5.1

## Replicate successful job training programs, such as the Community Action Partnership of Kern (CAPK), and Calfresh Employment Training (e.g. Fresno County Pilot)

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## RATIONALE

One of the largest structural contributors to food insecurity is the lack of employment opportunities offering living wages. In addition to an overall lack of economic opportunity, basic workforce skills and experience can be an additional major barrier for some Central Valley residents in finding long-term employment at a living wage.

Fresno County has been selected as one of ten pilot sites across the nation to improve the employability of CalFresh participants (nationally known as SNAP and previously as Food Stamps). CalFresh provides low-income Californians with benefits to purchase food on an EBT card; as of December 2015, more than 228,000 residents of Fresno County participate monthly.

The CalFresh Employment & Training Program funds employment and training services for CalFresh recipients in 33 counties throughout California. The Fresno County pilot is a CalFresh Employment & Training program that received additional federal funds to develop and test effective workforce strategies. As of January 2016, pilot services are offered in nine different sites throughout the county by Reading and Beyond, a nonprofit organization based in Fresno. Its Fresno Bridge Academy program addresses barriers to sustained employment through services such as basic education, job training, support services, subsidized and unsubsidized employment, retention services, and ongoing case management. The pilot's multi-generational approach includes parenting skills, financial literacy, and services to ensure children are excelling in school. A partnership with the Fresno County Economic Development Corporation will help place participants in high-wage occupations in high-growth industry clusters.

Some successful employment training and preparation programs also partner with food banks. For example, the CAPK job training program provides transferable skills and workforce

training to approximately 50 graduates per year. Trainees initially participate through the Employment Prep Program through the Department of Human Services and are then kept on for further training funded by the Mexican American Opportunities Foundation. After a 30-day volunteer period, participants begin a 6-month employment period with the food bank, where their training focuses on learning workforce and transferable skills, particularly warehouse skills. The aim is for graduates to go on to find permanent employment. Replicating this and other programs in other counties, with a focus on helping graduates find employment with dignity at a living wage, can help mitigate some of the structural causes of food insecurity for vulnerable populations.

## BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

- Long-term funding sustainability is a challenge to grant-funded programs. Programs often cannot continue when grants end.
- There is a relatively high attrition rate (60-70%) in the CAPK program, with barriers such as family issues and lack of very basic workforce skills. Graduates may require longer training periods and more hands-on help with job searches, as only about one third of current graduates successfully find permanent employment.
- A criminal background and/or lack of a previous employment history can still be large barriers to program participants finding permanent employment.

## MAJOR STEPS

1. Investigate existing programs in other counties.
2. Investigate potential funding resources.
3. Develop a marketing component targeting Central Valley agriculture-sector employers to improve job placement. Pursue outreach strategies that highlight success stories through media including web videos, ag alerts, public service announcements, and posts to ag blogs. Venues for ag audiences may include Ag Alert, Growing CA, and Planting Seeds blog.
4. Incorporate the idea of "Work with Dignity" - job training programs should support a living wage and work with dignity.
5. Look at ways to extend job training programs for those individuals who may require longer training.

# APPENDIX 1. ADDITIONAL IDEAS

The following were ideas discussed by the Food Access Working Group that, with additional investigation and development, have potential to become recommendations.

1. Pursue partnerships and linkages with the healthcare system, particularly as managed care providers seek innovative practices. Models to potentially grow include:

    a. Joint WIC and healthcare enrollment.
    b. Programs that give prescriptions for healthy food (address affordability).
    c. WIC-vendor partnerships with local growers.

2. Work to modernize systems for federal and other food access programs, regarding enrollment, participation, redemption, etc., with a priority of participant experience.

3. Work to improve access to healthy foods in corner markets by addressing infrastructure challenges.



The CDFA Office of Farm to Fork aims to promote and protect California agriculture, lessen the impact of food insecurity, foster healthy environments, and improve market access – through coordination, education, and outreach.