

# CHILD NUTRITION REAUTHORIZATION

## ***Prioritizing Dietary Quality, Expanding Access, and Supporting Schools***

### **Recommendation #1: Expand the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) to all elementary schools**

Congress established FFVP to help provide low-income children exposure to a wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables they might not otherwise have access to at home or school by serving a fresh fruit or vegetable snack daily in the classroom. About 7,600 elementary schools now participate in the program, out of 67,000 elementary schools nationwide. With more than 95% of USDA commodities available to schools being canned, dried, frozen, or juiced, FFVP is critical to providing access to fresh produce. Interest in FFVP currently outpaces funding, which prioritizes the highest needs schools first. Yet, many worthy schools with high free lunch rates, are not able to participate. Expanding to all elementary schools would improve dietary quality for all students, reduce stigma, and ease administrative application burden on schools.

### **Recommendation #2: Apply a cash value benefit for fruits and vegetables to out of school EBT**

Out of school EBT, including Summer and Pandemic-EBT, are important resources to ensure that children have access to meals when school is out of session. With USDA and Congressional intent to expand EBT to all students during the summer, it will be critically important to ensure that children have the same access to fruits and vegetables at home as they do through school meals. Providing an evidence-based cash value benefit for produce (modeled after WIC) to EBT, can help meet this goal and drive local demand for fresh produce in areas that have historically struggled to provide retail access to healthy foods.

### **Recommendation #3: Expand WIC to age 6, Update the WIC Food package and permanently increase the fruit and vegetable benefit for moms and kids**

CNR legislation should reinforce USDA's planned update to the food package to ensure that USDA increases the cash value benefit for fruits and vegetables. The current temporary increased benefit to reflect the Dietary Guidelines for Americans' recommended amounts should be made permanent, or expanded

### **Recommendation #4: Allow schools and other sites that participate in existing USDA child nutrition programs to distribute fresh produce to increase consumption and meet needs of entire families.**

Schools and youth-serving organizations played a vital role in keeping entire families fed throughout the COVID-19 emergency. Congress and USDA should identify ways to continue fresh produce procurement programs and prioritize schools and other youth-focused distribution sites to help families meet fruit and vegetable recommendations consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

### **Recommendation #5: Make permanent USDA School Kitchen Equipment Grants**

Ninety percent of schools need at least one piece of kitchen equipment, and costs attributed to COVID-19 meal service have only exacerbated this challenge. Additionally, data show that slicing whole produce and providing options through a grab-and-go line are effective strategies to increase consumption of fruits and vegetables. providing annual appropriations for USDA School Kitchen Equipment Grants. These grants should be made permanent as laid out in the School Food Modernization Act.