



Making Fresh Affordable



CalFresh benefits | Sacramento County Department of Human Assistance

What is CalFresh?



CalFresh is California's version of SNAP — the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.



The name "CalFresh" replaced "Food Stamps" in 2008.



CalFresh food stamps/coupons were replaced by EBT cards nationwide in 2004.



While the origin of U.S. food stamps dates to 1939, SNAP directly stems from the Food Stamp Act of 1964. It became a nationwide program in 1974.



In Sacramento County, approximately 103,000 households (243,000 individuals) participate in CalFresh.* (*March 2015)



According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the average family of four with two young children, using a low-cost food plan, will spend \$719.30 a month on groceries.



The average amount of benefits received for a household of one is about \$194 per month.



CalFresh benefits apply to more than just food — they also go toward purchasing seeds and plants to grow produce for household use.



Director of the Sacramento County Department of Human Assistance Ann Edwards says CalFresh not only supports local families, it supports the local economy.
PHOTO BY LAURA MARIE ANTHONY

Helping Everyone Eat Healthy

CalFresh improves food security for 103,000 Sacramento County households

by Evan Tuchinsky

Fresh food is healthy food, but when money gets tight, grocery shoppers tend to bypass meat and produce sections in favor of the aisles with packaged or processed items.

CalFresh helps nearly a quarter-million people in Sacramento County avoid this dilemma.

Formerly called "food stamps," CalFresh is California's Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program. County staff help enroll people in the CalFresh program. This enables low-income workers, students, families and seniors to infuse home-cooked meals with nutritious ingredients.

"For a family struggling to put food on the table, the impact of CalFresh benefits are immeasurable. Additionally, the USDA has shown that every dollar in CalFresh expenditures generates \$1.79 in economic activity. In Sacramento that equates to \$687 million in economic activity that supports our local economy," says Ann Edwards, director of the Sacramento County Department of Human Assistance (DHA), which oversees CalFresh.

Thanks to recent rule changes, more people than ever before are eligible for CalFresh. In Sacramento County alone, approximately 243,000 individuals from 103,000 households participate.

"It's not a welfare program, it's a nutrition program," says Vicki O'Brien, CalFresh program specialist for Sacramento County. "These benefits are supposed to assist with giving low-income households the ability to make sure their family is not hungry and to provide a means of stretching the household budget."

CalFresh is also accepted at more places than ever. Participants can redeem their benefits at farmers' markets just as readily as at grocery stores. In fact, some farmers' markets offer matching programs, doubling the dollar value for their CalFresh customers.

Even so, old habits die hard. Families still tend to "steer away" from the fresh items — perceived as costly — "and go toward items from the old commodity days," O'Brien says, "when the state used to hand out beans, rice, canned meat, peanut butter — those things that were high in protein yet not so expensive."

DHA administers CalFresh benefits and, through collaboratives with other county agencies, educates participants about healthy eating through cookbooks and informational pamphlets.

The Food Stamps Program formally originated in 1964. Back then, recipients actually got stamps to use at stores — thus the name food stamps. Those later became coupons, but the process stayed essentially the same: handing paper, distinct from money, to a cashier.

CalFresh now uses an EBT (Electronic Benefits Transfer) system. Participants swipe a card, as they would for other debit transactions.

"That's by design," O'Brien explains, "to help relieve some of the stigma attached to food stamps and CalFresh. The process looks the same as anyone else buying groceries."

The application process has grown more private. Residents can apply online, call DHA for an application, or book a confidential appointment at one of eight DHA facilities. The state's and county's CalFresh sites (at www.cdss.ca.gov and www.dha.sacounty.net) feature eligibility information and a prescreening tool.

It's improvements like these that will translate to better nutrition in Sacramento County, Edwards says.

"The impact of CalFresh benefits being more user friendly and confidential increases the likelihood that eligible individuals or families will apply for and use the much needed benefits," she says.

COVER PHOTO BY LAURA MARIE ANTHONY

**“
I’m pretty
health-conscious.
I want to feed my
children well.”**

Rachel Cooper
CalFresh participant

”

Rachel Cooper says CalFresh helps stretch her grocery budget to feed her family. She likes to purchase and prepare nutritious meals.

PHOTO BY
LAURA MARIE ANTHONY



Are you eligible for CalFresh?

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS:

Income limit calculated at 200% of the Federal Poverty Level



1 person with
\$1,946
gross income



3 people with
\$3,300
gross income



2 people with
\$2,622
gross income



4 people with
\$3,976
gross income

- Certain households (those with an elderly/disabled member) are eligible to higher income deductions which may increase their CalFresh benefits
- Non-citizens may qualify if they have lived in the country lawfully for five years, collect disability, or are minors with permanent residence under the Immigration and Naturalization Act

CHANGES:

- Eligibility for some households is no longer based on property or resources. Retirement accounts, bank accounts, vehicles and other possessions of value no longer count toward income.
- Formerly excluded drug felons are no longer denied participation in the CalFresh program.

FIND OUT!

CalFresh is available to many residents who don't realize they could qualify. The best way to see if you're eligible is to go online.

To see if you are eligible,
visit www.mybenefitscalwin.org

The Recipe for Healthy Eating

by Evan Tuchinsky

CalFresh helps mom keep nutritious food on the table

Rachel Cooper and her husband, Qasim Saoud, work hard to provide for their two preschool-age children and Saoud's mother, who lives with them. Cooper is a massage therapist, while Saoud delivers in-home supportive assistance and nursing care. Their income varies based on demand for their services.

Some months, money gets tight.

"Unfortunately, in the total cost of living, food is the one thing budgeted for that is flexible — versus keeping your lights on and getting your rent paid," Cooper says.

CalFresh fills the gap.

For her Elk Grove household, the benefits mean "not having to worry about food penny-for-penny," Cooper explains. On weeks when she might only have \$30 for groceries, CalFresh expands the budget dramatically.

"Feeding a family with \$100 is so much more realistic, less stressful, and I can buy quality foods with that," she says. "The farmers' market is a testament to that — I'm just amazingly grateful that that's even an option for us."

Cooper goes to the Elk Grove Farmers' Market each Saturday. Along with fresh fruits and vegetables, she purchases cheeses and baked goods.

Pantry staples and items for the children covered by WIC — such as milk, juice and cereal — come

from the local grocery store. Occasionally, budget-permitting, she'll splurge on "some extra ingredients to do something special."

Cutting costs doesn't mean cutting corners.

"I'm pretty health-conscious. I want to feed my children well," she says. "We don't eat a lot of candy, potato chips, ice cream. We drink absolutely no soda in our house. I usually use my [CalFresh] on more nutritious foods."

Cooper first signed up for supplemental nutrition assistance while living in Texas a decade ago. When she and Saoud relocated to her hometown, Berkeley, in 2011, she enrolled in CalFresh.

They moved to Elk Grove in February, seeking an affordable and family-friendly place to live. Cooper contacted the Sacramento County Department of Human Assistance about continuing benefits. She said the application experience had improved since the last time she enrolled in CalFresh.

"They streamlined the system. Their network of communication was more consistent. Everything was approved faster," she says. "What I really appreciated was that my case worker was responsive to email, which no other case worker I'd had was. When you have a question and you have a deadline to meet to be able to continue to qualify, every minute counts."

CalFresh Built Around You

Participating in CalFresh is easier than ever

by Evan Tuchinsky

You can find out if you're eligible for CalFresh benefits by checking the www.mybenefitscalwin.org website.

Ashley Arnold truly appreciates serving residents of Sacramento County. Her job — human services supervisor for the Department of Human Assistance — might seem to remove her from customer contact. But she's still improving the customer experience by training case workers who work with CalFresh participants.

"Customer service is one of our top priorities," says Arnold, who previously worked directly with customers at the county's Rancho Cordova bureau. "We're making [CalFresh] available and more user-friendly."

With so many ways to apply and so much assistance available, it's never been easier to participate in CalFresh.

Residents can apply online using the state's public benefits website (www.mybenefitscalwin.org). County employees also provide assistance over the phone. Or visit any of eight county offices for an application — or schedule an appointment with a CalFresh expert to complete the form. Finally, local food banks partner with DHA for CalFresh enrollment.

Participants are busy with work schedules and raising their families — finding time and even transportation to visit a county office can be a challenge. That's why

these options are making sure more people can access CalFresh at a time

Ashley Arnold trains case workers from the Department of Human Assistance, helping them provide excellent customer service to CalFresh participants.

PHOTOS BY LAURA MARIE ANTHONY



that's convenient for them. Most parts of the CalFresh application process can be completed online, with a quick follow-up appointment by phone. Required documents also can be scanned and submitted online.

"The best way to apply is definitely online," Arnold says, "because people can do it from home, right there, and someone will call them with a phone appointment — so they really don't have to take time out of their schedule to visit an office."

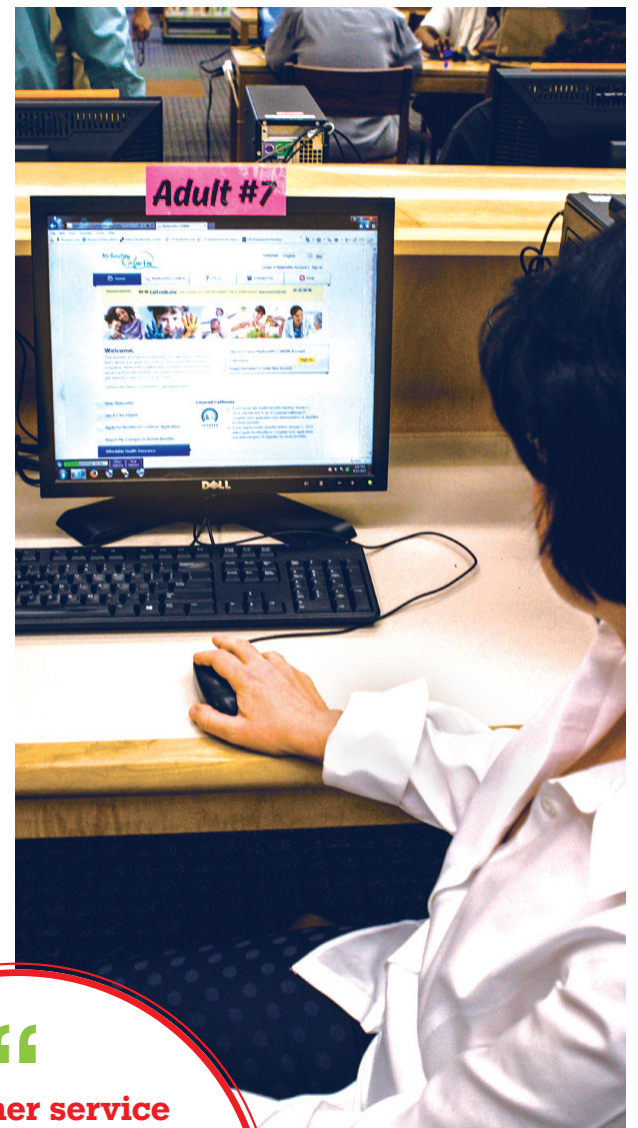
The web connection is making CalFresh participation easier for both first-time applicants and those who are reapplying, perhaps as "intercounty transfers" after moving from somewhere else in California.

Maintaining a connection after enrollment has been easier thanks to the web, too. Most people will need to report changes in their income and living situation, which can be done right online. Case workers not only meet with clients in person but also communicate via email and phone.

"It's the modern age — people are texting and emailing all over the place," Arnold says. "That's why the online application is so nice. They can do it on their own time, and we will respond to them with various types of appointments [with case workers] based on what works best for them."

Unsure if you'd qualify? You can find the answer online, or DHA personnel can help determine if you meet CalFresh's criteria. Arnold says you may be surprised by what you find.

"More people who apply are eligible than are not, definitely," she says.



You can find out if you're eligible for CalFresh benefits by checking the www.mybenefitscalwin.org website.

"Customer service is one of our top priorities. We're making it available and user-friendly."

Ashley Arnold
Human Services supervisor

Applying Online www.mybenefitscalwin.org

This website is the fast, easy way for California residents to apply for medical, food and cash assistance programs in their county. Here's what you can do online:

1. See if I am eligible

Enter information for your household, including number of members, income, housing costs and other costs (have paystubs and bills available to get this information). Find out if you may qualify for CalFresh, Medi-Cal or CalWORKs right away!

2. Apply for benefits

Fill out the application for assistance. It usually takes 10-20 minutes. If you don't have time, you can start an application and then return to it later.

3. Report changes

Report changes in income or complete renewals for benefits online — or request these forms by mail.

4. View MyBenefits

Check your benefit status and amount.



Ready to Eat

by Jennifer Bonnett

Restaurant Meals Program serves people who lack access to hot, nutritious food

For certain residents in Sacramento County, eating a hot sandwich or a warm bowl of soup for lunch isn't an option.

More than 30 restaurants in Sacramento County are offering hot, prepared food to certain residents as part of a CalFresh program that helps qualified households and individuals meet their nutritional needs through restaurant meals.

Elderly residents ages 60 and up, disabled household members and homeless households can participate in the Restaurant Meals Program, and benefits are preloaded onto the user's EBT (Electronic Benefits Transfer) card. Purchases are verified through a point-of-sale system at the time of the transaction.

Without this program, many people would not have access to a hot, prepared meal, according to Brenda Griffin, a Sacramento County human services program planner who helped implement the program.

"Many homeless individuals have no access to facilities where they can prepare a hot meal," she says. "Some elderly and disabled households, too, reach a point where they can't purchase and prepare nutritious meals."

Griffin says it was challenging at first because restaurant owners are required to allow the recipient to sit inside the restaurant to consume their meal. "A lot of the homeless come inside with everything they own because they don't want to leave it outside where it can be stolen," Griffin explains.

But as more and more restaurants signed on, owners spoke to one another and spread the word about the benefits of the program.

"It's a way of serving homeless folks and giving them an opportunity to eat more nutritious meals," she says.

It's a way of serving homeless folks and giving them an opportunity to eat more nutritious meals.

Brenda Griffin
Sacramento County Human Services

She saw an uptick in local restaurant participation when the economy took a downturn. Griffin surmises local restaurants saw an opportunity to meet their bottom line and signed up for the Restaurant Meals Program. Today, there are hundreds of recipients in Sacramento County who qualify for the Restaurant Meals Program.

To participate, qualified EBT users slide their cards through special point-of-sale equipment and enter a personal identification number.

If the client is ineligible to receive the Restaurant Meals benefit, an error message will be displayed.

Restaurants that currently offer the program include Subway, Taco Bell, Blimpie Sub Shop, Burger King, El Pollo Loco, Oak Park Market, New Rice Bowl Express, Pizza Hut, Quiznos and Wienerschnitzel.

Shawn Hazeghazan, a local Subway owner, says he applied more than a year ago because he wanted to try it out. Since then, he says the clientele has grown from about three a week to four or five a day.

"We're giving the participants options, and we're helping them," he says.

Griffin would like to see more local restaurants sign up to participate.

"Even though it's mostly fast food on the list, there are some healthy alternatives there like salads and sandwiches," she says.

While it is a state program, each county determines whether it wants to participate in the Restaurant Meals Program. Sacramento County is only one of seven in the state to offer it, while California is just one of four participating states. Others include Arizona, Michigan and New York, Griffin says.



Subway franchise owner Shawn Hazeghazan says he is pleased to be part of CalFresh's Restaurant Meals Program, which serves participants who may not otherwise have access to warm, fresh food.
PHOTO BY CHARLES GUNN

Help provide a meal to those in need

The Restaurant Meals Program allows qualified households with homeless, disabled and/or elderly (ages 60 and above) individuals who receive CalFresh benefits to purchase hot, prepared food from participating restaurants using those benefits. Restaurant owners can help provide food to Sacramento County residents by participating in the program.

To accept CalFresh benefits, a restaurant must sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the county to be submitted with the federal application for authorization.

Once enrolled in the program, a restaurant must have or obtain point-

of-sale equipment that can process EBT transactions. The equipment must include a personal identification number pad to allow the beneficiary to input his or her code.

Restaurants participating in the Restaurant Meals Program are prohibited from charging sales tax or meal tax on prepared foods purchased with EBT CalFresh benefits. However, prepared foods purchased with EBT cash benefits are taxable. Cash benefits are different from CalFresh benefits because CalFresh purchases are limited to food items. Cash benefits can be used to purchase food and non-food items.

If you own a restaurant in Sacramento County and would like more information about how you can participate in this program, call 916-875-3719.



Making Fresh Affordable

CalFresh farmers' market vouchers give recipients more options

by Brittany Wesely

A new program is helping to bridge the gap between low-income families and access to healthy produce. With the goal of addressing food access issues in underserved neighborhoods of Sacramento, Alchemist Community Development Corporation is helping CalFresh recipients use their benefits at local farmers' markets.

"We have this great model of farmers' markets that benefits the community and provides very healthy food for consumers. But we want to make that community asset equally available to all people, regardless of income," says Davida Douglas, executive director of Alchemist CDC.

Through its program, Alchemist CDC enables recipients of CalFresh to access fresh and healthy produce using their EBT card, which can be challenging in a farmers' market setting.

"When food stamps went from being paper to a debit card type of system, it sort of cut farmers' markets out of the loop. It's hard for every vendor to get the machine and the accounts to be able to process the cards," Douglas says. "So we stepped in to help take it back to paper, making it so that people can use their benefits at farmers' markets."

Alchemist CDC operates CalFresh booths at participating markets in Sacramento County. There, CalFresh recipients may use their electronic benefits transfer (EBT) card to purchase paper vouchers for what they want to spend at the market that day. Participants then use the vouchers to pay for produce, and vendors return the vouchers to Alchemist CDC for payment.

"We're providing CalFresh customers with a shopping venue that is uniquely, overwhelmingly healthy and fresh,"



Davida Douglas, executive director of Alchemist Community Development Corporation, says using CalFresh at farmers' markets is a win-win for everyone.
PHOTO BY LAURA MARIE ANTHONY

Douglas says. "It's easier to make healthy shopping choices and it's a great way for parents to start building positive associations with fresh food for their kids."

Bridgitte Rivers, program coordinator at Alchemist CDC, sees firsthand how much CalFresh clients benefit from shopping at the farmers' markets. Rivers recalls a single mother who does most of her shopping at the farmers' markets. The mother was able to purchase more food with the CalFresh benefits and she made sure her children ate more vegetables.

"She gives each kid one CalFresh dollar and allows them to buy a fruit or vegetable of their choice," Rivers says. "She does this to encourage healthy eating and because she can learn what her kids like to eat by watching what they buy."

Last year alone, Alchemist CDC helped 7,100 farmers' market customers make the most of their CalFresh benefits. Sixteen Sacramento County markets currently participate in a voucher program, but Douglas says she expects many more to join the effort soon.

"We're providing CalFresh customers with a shopping venue that is uniquely, overwhelmingly healthy and fresh."

Davida Douglas
Executive director of Alchemist Community Development Corporation

The positive impacts of the Alchemist CDC program don't end with the consumer. Douglas says it also supports the community as a whole.

"We're bringing more customers in to the farmers' markets, which bring vibrance to neighborhoods and additional income for our regional farmers," Douglas says. "It's a win-win."

CalFresh benefits go farther at farmers' markets

When CalFresh recipients spend their benefits at participating farmers' markets, they may receive extra funds in the form of Market Match vouchers that can be used to purchase fresh produce and nuts. Operated by Alchemist Community Development Corporation, Market Match helps connect CalFresh recipients to fresh and healthy produce, while at the same time supporting the local economy and California growers.

To participate, visit the CalFresh booth at participating farmers' markets to purchase CalFresh

vouchers and get bonus Market Match vouchers. CalFresh benefits will be matched up to \$5-\$20, depending on the market. Check your local market for details.

The Market Match program begins on June 1 for a limited time as funds are available. Learn more about the program and see a list of participating farmers' markets by visiting www.alchemistcdc.org.

Frequently Asked Questions About CalFresh

by Brittany Wesely

Mey Saechao understands firsthand the power of a little help to get through a tough time. When she was 6 years old, Saechao and her family were refugees of the Vietnam war and immigrated from Thailand to the United States. During their first years in the country, Saechao's family relied on public aid while they settled into their new home and found jobs. She remembers watching the county workers with admiration and gratitude, and knew it was what she wanted to do when she grew up. Today Saechao is a human services specialist for Sacramento County, where she enjoys connecting people in need to services that can help. Saechao answered some questions we had about CalFresh.

How can CalFresh help me?

CalFresh helps you to put healthy and nutritious food on the table. It is a nutrition-assistance program that you do not have to pay back. Since it's a federally-funded program, the program not only helps individuals who utilize it, but also helps the entire community by putting money into the local economy.

How will I receive and use my CalFresh benefits?

Once you are determined eligible for CalFresh, you will receive an EBT card, which is used like a debit card. The CalFresh benefits are electronically transferred to the EBT card monthly and always on the same day.

What can I buy with CalFresh benefits?

CalFresh benefits can be used to purchase food to eat and seeds and edible plants for growing your own food at home. Customers who are elderly, disabled or homeless may also be eligible to use the benefits for hot meals at participating restaurants.

How long will I receive CalFresh benefits?

As long as you meet the eligibility requirements, you may receive CalFresh benefits for as long as you need.

What if I have a criminal record? Can I still be eligible for CalFresh?

People with criminal and felony records may be eligible for CalFresh benefits. Recently, the qualifications were changed to allow people with previous drug-related convictions to receive CalFresh benefits, if they meet the eligibility requirements.

What if I am not a citizen?

CalFresh is available to qualifying U.S. citizens and legal, permanent non-citizen residents who have lived in the country for at least five years or are receiving disability-related assistance benefits, regardless of entry date. If you do not personally qualify for CalFresh, other people in your household may still qualify and receive CalFresh benefits.

If you are a legal, permanent non-citizen resident and are determined ineligible for CalFresh, you may qualify for the California Food Assistance Program (CFAP). CFAP is a program specifically for immigrants who have a lawful permanent resident status.

CalFresh client records are kept confidential and are not shared or reported to immigration. CalFresh will not impact your immigration status.

Do I still qualify if I don't have children?

Yes. The program is geared to families and individuals.

What can I do if my benefits have been denied?

If you are determined ineligible for CalFresh and you believe you are eligible, or if you feel you have been discriminated against, you may file for a fair hearing. If you are determined ineligible, you will receive a letter of denial. To file for a fair hearing, complete the fair hearing section on the backside of the letter. You'll then be contacted by a hearing specialist who will evaluate the situation and help fix the problem, if needed.



Sacramento County CalFresh Human
Services Specialist Mey Saechao
PHOTO BY CHARLES GUNN



Healthy Food for All

Working families, students, seniors — we all need access to healthy, fresh food.

CalFresh provides just that: Fresh fruits, vegetables, meats and seafood that may seem too expensive for people on tight budgets to purchase. CalFresh makes these items more affordable — both at grocery stores and at farmers' markets.

CalFresh is an assistance program, infusing households with nutritious foods. It serves as a supplement, rather than the sole source of grocery money.

There are 243,000 individuals in Sacramento County who receive CalFresh now. Do you know someone else who may be in need of assistance?

Nutritious Food Is Within Reach

How to get started with CalFresh

There are multiple ways to get information and begin applying for CalFresh in Sacramento County

Online

www.mybenefitscalwin.org
www.dha.saccounty.net

In person

**Visit a Sacramento County
Department of Human Assistance office:**

Pat Wright Building
1725 28th St., Sacramento

Research Bureau
3960 Research Drive, Sacramento

Fulton Bureau
2700 Fulton Ave., Sacramento

North Highlands Bureau
5747 Watt Ave., Sacramento

Rancho Cordova Bureau
10013 Folsom, Suite 1, Sacramento

Bowling Green Bureau
4433 Florin Road, Suite 160, Sacramento

Susie Gaines-Mitchell Building
2450 Florin Road, Sacramento

Galt Bureau
210 N. Lincoln Way, Galt

By phone

(916) 874-3100 or
(209) 744-0499

Find out more at food banks

**Sacramento Food Bank
& Family Services**
3308 3rd Ave., Sacramento
(916) 456-1980
sacramentofoodbank.org

River City Food Bank
1800 28th St., Sacramento
(916) 446-2627
rivercityfoodbank.org

St. Vincent DePaul Food Bank
3100 Norris Ave., Sacramento
(916) 485-3482

**New Covenant Emergency
Food Bank & Family Services**
8460 Belvedere Ave. #7,
Sacramento
(916) 241-5769

**South Sacramento Interfaith
Partnership Food Closet**
5625 24th St., Sacramento
(916) 428-5290

**Cordova Community
Food Locker**
10497 Coloma Road,
Rancho Cordova
(916) 364-8973
sjvparish.com

Elk Grove Food Bank
9820 Dino Drive #140,
Elk Grove
(916) 685-8453
elkgrovefoodbank.org

Twin Lakes Food Bank
327 Montrose Drive, Folsom
(916) 985-6232
twinlakesfoodbank.org

Orangevale Food Bank
6483 Main Ave., Orangevale
(916) 304-3663
orangevalefoodbank.org

South County Services
539 N. Lincoln Way, Galt
(209) 745-9174
southcountyservices.org

Rio Vista Ministry
1105-A Airport Road,
Rio Vista
(707) 374-5706
riovistacommunityservices.org



Dear Readers:

Today it is my pleasure to write to you about CalFresh and the benefits it provides to our community. CalFresh, nationally known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), was designed to provide low-income individuals and families with better access to healthy and fresh foods that may not have been affordable otherwise.

Far too often, children and families can go hungry, as access to fresh produce or healthy foods is not always readily accessible. Food insecurity can lead to poor nutrition, which increases the risk for chronic diseases. More importantly, without fresh food, children can suffer growth and developmental impairments, and studies have shown that children with proper eating habits do better in school, than those without.

CalFresh also brings important economic benefits to our region. Benefits are easily accessible through the Golden State Advantage (EBT) Card, which is accepted at most grocery stores and farmers' markets. When users redeem their benefits at local stores, these dollars go straight into our economy.

CalFresh supports the health of low-income families, our economy and local retailers. If you think you might be eligible for benefits and have not already applied, I encourage you to contact the Sacramento County Department of Human Assistance for further assistance.

Sincerely,

DORIS MATSUI
Member of Congress