

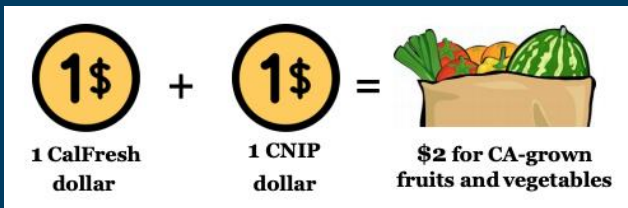


Findings from an Evaluation of the California Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP in California) 2020-2022

Research Brief • May 2023

BACKGROUND

The California Nutrition Incentive Program (CNIP) provides CalFresh shoppers with a dollar-for-dollar match when purchasing CA-grown produce at participating markets. In 2020, CNIP expanded from being offered solely at farmers' markets to being offered at select food stores as well. CNIP incentives were offered as tokens or scrip at farmers' markets and were offered at other stores as instant discounts at the register or as coupons for future purchases of CA-grown fruits and vegetables.



WHAT WE DID

From summer 2020 - spring 2022, the Nutrition Policy Institute conducted baseline and follow-up surveys with 149 CalFresh shoppers from 9 farmers' markets and 3 food stores newly implementing CNIP. We asked about fruit and vegetable consumption, food security, and perceptions and experiences when using CNIP to understand their associations. We also asked and qualitatively analyzed responses to open-ended questions regarding experiences using CNIP for a random sub-sample of 43 CalFresh shoppers. Additionally, we conducted baseline, midpoint, and endpoint interviews with the managers of the three stores newly implementing CNIP to understand their awareness, perception, and understanding of the program.

KEY FINDINGS: CALFRESH SHOPPERS

Most CalFresh shoppers used CNIP (73%), and 41% always received the maximum incentive available.

Most CalFresh shoppers reported that CNIP was “important” or “very important” (87%) in their decision to shop at the market.

CalFresh shoppers reported overwhelmingly positive experiences with CNIP:

“I felt good. I was calmer because I knew that I could buy more vegetables at affordable prices.”

While CNIP utilization did not have statistically significant impacts on quantitative measures of shoppers' fruit and vegetable intake or food security:

- **CalFresh shoppers reported that CNIP influenced the kinds of fruits and vegetables they purchased:**

“I feel like the... program has incentivized us to buy locally grown produce. I also feel like the... program has made locally grown produce more affordable. And I most likely wouldn't have made the effort to choose those products before.”

- **CalFresh shoppers reported buying more fruits and vegetables with CNIP:**

“It's enabled me to double my purchases. Not only can I get my regular staples, but I can also try new products or new fruits or vegetables that I never thought to use in my everyday cooking.”

CalFresh shoppers wanted CNIP to continue:

“I would really hope that they keep it going. I think it really is going to incentivize families that are low on funds or are low on food stamps or have limited resources to get those fresh foods...”

“I think they have to keep it. It's freaking awesome.”

CalFresh shoppers supported CNIP expanding to other retail outlets:

“... it's a bit more beneficial for us, ... I don't drive, so it's harder for me to get to the places where they had the participating locations. And the market is closer to my house here. It's better for me that the program is being offered at the stores.”

KEY FINDINGS: STORE MANAGERS

The three **store managers** in our sample **reported participating in CNIP** for different reasons, including to **make food more affordable** for people with low incomes, **support local agriculture**, and **generate customer loyalty and competitive advantage**.

“We’ve wanted to be more accessible while still maintaining that organic integrity. And that is one reason I’m excited about CNIP. Because that will help us relieve some of those tensions.”

All three **store managers found the program beneficial** and **would like to continue offering it**.

“Everyone in the store really likes the program. It feels good to press that button and see \$20 come off someone’s produce bill.”

The three **store managers were mixed** about **whether CNIP led to increased procurement of CA-grown produce**.

“...on those border cases, where there are California or [non-CA] options available, if it’s a toss up... it definitely puts the thumb on the scale towards California grown... [Given] the logistical hassle of having to take things on and off benefit, I’ll say, ‘You know, let’s just keep it California.’”

“The most important thing for our customers is the price. Price is king.”

The three **store managers reported more repeat customers** because of the program, but did not report **new CalFresh customers**.

“I noticed that there’s a lot more people coming back because of this program.”

“We haven’t seen a rush of new people coming in. But like I said, it may require time.”

The three **store managers reported lower redemption rates than anticipated**.

“Redemption isn’t as high as it could be. I wonder if part of it is that there’s a delay. It just takes time to build awareness.”

The three **store managers experienced technical challenges setting up their POS systems, managing software systems with CA/not CA-grown produce, scanning coupons, etc.**

“I need to make sure, okay, this is from Bolivia – this week, it was from California. We need to mark that. We need to make sure that gets updated in the computer. So there’s all these little steps, that no one of them is incredibly onerous, but added together are a lot of friction points, little extra things we need to add into our systems.”

CONCLUSIONS

CalFresh shoppers reported having an **overwhelmingly positive experience** with the program. Store managers also found the program beneficial, though the details of their experiences varied quite a bit.

CalFresh shoppers described CNIP as a **big help** and attributed being **able to buy more fruits and vegetables and different kinds of fruits and vegetables** to the program, though we did not detect statistically significant impacts of CNIP utilization on quantitative measures of participants’ fruit and vegetable consumption or food security.

CalFresh shoppers expressed the **desire for CNIP to continue** and **supported the expansion** of the program to other retail outlets. They described the CNIP expansion as **wonderful** and a **great help** for low-income families.

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