



Shopper and Farmer/Vendor Perceptions of Changed Maximum Incentive Levels at Farmers' Markets Participating in the California Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP in California): Evaluation Findings

Research Brief • May 2023

BACKGROUND

To address food security challenges that arose during the COVID-19 pandemic, the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) acquired funding to increase the maximum dollar-for-dollar match incentive available for the purchase of fruit and vegetables at select farmers' markets implementing the California Nutrition Incentive Program (CNIP). The funding was provided by the United States Department of Agriculture's Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program COVID Relief and Response (GusCRR) grants program.



WHAT WE DID

During the summer-fall of 2022, Nutrition Policy Institute researchers interviewed 30 CalFresh shoppers and 10 farmers/vendors at farmers' markets that increased the CNIP maximum incentive from \$10 to \$15 between September 2021 and April 2022. The CalFresh shopper interviews elicited shoppers' perceptions of CNIP and how the increase and subsequent decrease in the maximum incentive amount affected their shopping behaviors. The farmer/vendor interviews assessed farmer/vendor experiences with CNIP, the program's effect on their sales, and their perceptions of how the increased maximum incentive affected CalFresh shoppers' behaviors.

KEY FINDINGS:

CalFresh shoppers described the CNIP program positively:

"[CNIP] helps a lot. It makes my food dollars go further. And I love being down here at the farmers' market every week, and it's all California grown. It's like some of the vendors are practically friends now. So I really enjoy... coming here. And it really helps...expand my food budget."

CalFresh shoppers described the increase as helpful, enabling them to buy more items at the farmers' market:

"It was really wonderful for me. When I saw that they gave me \$15, I said, 'Wow, that's a little more than before.' And so, obviously, I was able to buy more."

"Yes, I was really pleased, happy that it had gone up, because I could get more food, I could buy more types of fruit and vegetables."

CalFresh shoppers were disappointed by the reduction in the CNIP benefit:

"... I liked it better when it was \$15. It was better for my overall budget. So yeah, I am disappointed it went back down."

"It was unfortunate, because I had to make some changes to adjust ... I wasn't expecting that. I wasn't happy with that. I preferred that it would have continued ... it was much better, to be able to get more produce."

CalFresh shoppers were grateful for the program, despite being disappointed when benefit levels declined:

"I'm just grateful, even with the changes. You know, I might not be able to get as many items as before, but it's worth it. I believe that [it] is still a blessing."

"I'm appreciative for anything I get, so I understand that funding fluctuates ... So I am just appreciative, anything helps."

KEY FINDINGS:

Farmers/vendors were satisfied with the CNIP program and plan to continue participating. The majority cited increased customer base and sales as benefits of the program and the temporary increase:

“Every week I think new customers are coming in. And it's for the same reason. It's for the Market Match/[CNIP]. Because it gives them a little bit more and they can buy more vegetables and fruits. And you also make a little bit more money.”

“... I'm honestly really satisfied because we've increased sales, probably like two times more than it did before when the market started. And especially with the whole COVID ... I feel like ever since COVID happened people have... used it more than ever before.”



Farmers/vendors recommended increasing outreach and promotion of CNIP to increase shopper participation in the program:

“... I think it would also help a bit more, for example, that there be signs informing that they're offering people this kind of help, so that customers know more about what's happening with Market Match/[CNIP].”

“Perhaps promote it more ... at first, we were also like: 'Wow, and where did this come from? How did it come about?' But you didn't see promotions and stuff. You need promotions.”



Farmers/vendors perceived CNIP as a positive program for shoppers, themselves, and the community:

“... it makes the customer's market experience more positive because they're allowed to go and purchase more produce and purchase more ideally fresh foods...”

“... [you] get a Market Match and your money goes further. Not only that, you're supporting the local economy, you're helping keep local jobs here in California.”“... when people have greater spending power, it allows them to say 'Okay, well, you know, that was a really positive experience. I really enjoyed that I want to continue on and try something new.”

CONCLUSION

- Shoppers and farmers/vendors were happy with the CNIP program.
- Shoppers described CNIP as beneficial, helpful, and wonderful.
- Farmers/vendors described CNIP as an enhancement to their sales and a benefit to shoppers.
- Shoppers reported being able to buy more items at the market due to the temporary increase from \$10 to \$15; many strongly preferred to receive the higher match.
- Shoppers were disappointed when the max incentive decreased, but expressed gratitude for the program nonetheless.
- Farmers/vendors suggested increased promotion of CNIP to increase program participation.

Nutrition Policy Institute • Website: npi.ucanr.edu • Twitter: @UCnpi

Suggested citation: Sam-Chen S, Hewawitharana S, Felix C, Strohlic R, Gosliner W. Shopper and Farmer/Vendor Perceptions of Changed Maximum Incentive Levels at Farmers' Markets Participating in the California Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP in California): Evaluation Findings. Research Brief. University of California, Agriculture and Natural Resources, Nutrition Policy Institute. April 2023.

This work is supported by the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program COVID Relief and Response (GusCRR) grants program from the United States Department of Agriculture. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the view of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.