

Healthy Food for a Healthy Pennsylvania

Feeding America estimates that 1.35 million Pennsylvanians, 383,000 of whom are children, do not have reliable access to enough food for a healthy life.¹ A diverse, equitable, and secure food system helps to ensure economic opportunity, environmental sustainability, and access to affordable, healthy foods. For example, the consumption of fresh produce reduces the risks of cardiovascular disease and cancer.²

Restore Funding for the PA Farm Bill

The PA Farm Bill focuses on strengthening Pennsylvania's agriculture system. Comprised of a dozen different programs, it recognizes agriculture is an essential part of our state's economy and food system.³ In the 2019-2020 fiscal year, Pennsylvania's legislature allocated \$24 million to PA Farm Bill programs.⁴ However, funding was decreased to \$13.6 million in the subsequent two years.⁵ Funding should be restored to initial levels or higher in future years.

Increase the Minimum Wage to \$15 an Hour and Index to Inflation

Raising the minimum wage would reduce working Pennsylvanians' dependence on emergency food systems and increase their ability to purchase healthy foods. As a policy measure, higher wages directly address a root issue of food insecurity, bringing dignity to people's lives and reducing health inequities. States with higher minimum wages have lower rates of obesity, higher birth weights, and fewer other indicators of poor health, compared to states that have kept the federal minimum wage.⁶ Still today, over 90,000 Pennsylvanians earn the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour—the majority of them are women and one third are people of color.

Strengthen Food Assistance Programs

Expand healthy food incentives for SNAP recipients

Healthy food incentive programs through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) encourage SNAP recipients to purchase more fruits and vegetables using discounts and other special incentives. Where these programs exist, Pennsylvanians can use incentives at local farmers markets, creating the additional benefit of supporting local agriculture. Cumberland and Perry Counties already have a Healthy Food Incentive program, but 52 other Pennsylvania counties in Pennsylvania do not.⁷ Working to allocate state and private funding for these programs should leverage additional federal funding to expand these programs in existing areas and throughout the state.

Provide grants to improve food assistance infrastructure

To meet the needs of underserved populations, new investments in food assistance infrastructure are required to improve storage units, delivery vehicles, and more. Most of the nonprofit organizations providing these services lack the capital to cover these critical expenses. The state should provide grant funding for infrastructure investments, similar to the Department of Environmental Protection's 2019-2020 Food Recovery Infrastructure Grant.⁸

Increase funding for State Food Purchase Program & Pennsylvania Agricultural Surplus System

During the pandemic, an additional one million Pennsylvanians sought assistance from food banks compared to pre-pandemic levels.⁹ In response, the state legislature added \$3 million to the State Food Purchase Program (SFPP), which is

the primary source of state funding for food banks. These additional funds were the first substantial increase in funding for the program in nearly 15 years. Similarly, the Pennsylvania Agricultural Surplus System (PASS)—a program that redirects PA-grown produce to food banks, instead of allowing it go to waste—is funded at \$2.5 million, while food bank advocates are seeking \$5 million.¹⁰ Increased funding and expanded eligibility for these programs would help to ensure that healthy foods reach the tables of all Pennsylvanians.

Expand School Meal Programs

Support Healthy School Meals for All legislation in Congress

Federal legislation that guarantees free school breakfasts and lunches to all students regardless of income would ensure that every student has access to the nutrition they need to be healthy and succeed in school.¹¹ School lunch and breakfast programs currently feed close to 30 million students, many from low-income families. However, federal expansion of the programs would eliminate several issues for both schools and students. Some food insecure families may not meet current program eligibility requirements, leading to families to accrue school meal debt. Students participating in free and reduced-cost meal programs are often stigmatized. Administration of these programs is also a substantial burden for schools that could be reduced by making every student eligible.

Create state-based incentives for schools to develop out-of-school time meal programs

Short of universal school meal programs at the federal level, Pennsylvania should create incentives for schools to assist with students' nutritional needs on the weekend and over the summer months. Other states, including Texas and Florida, mandate or provide support for school districts to provide summer meals to students.¹²

¹ Feeding America. (2020). *Food Insecurity in Pennsylvania*. Retrieved October 26, 2021 from <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2019/overall/pennsylvania>

² Aune, D., Giovannucci, E., Boffetta, P., Gadnes, L., Keum, N., Norat, T., Greenwood, D., Riboli, E., Batten, L., Tonstad, S. (2017). Fruit and Vegetable Intake and the Risk of Cardiovascular Disease, Total Cancer, and All-Cause Mortality – A Systematic Review and Dose-Response Meta-Analysis of Prospective Studies. *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 46(3), 1029-1056. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1093/ije/dyw319>

³ Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. (n.d.). *PA Farm Bill*. Retrieved October 26, 2021 from <https://www.agriculture.pa.gov/Pages/PA-Farm-Bill.aspx>

⁴ Governor Tom Wolf. (2019). *Pennsylvania Farm Bill*. <https://www.governor.pa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/021319-farm-bill.pdf>

⁵ Governor Tom Wolf. (2021, July 8). *Wolf Administration Continues Investing in Future of Agriculture, \$13.6 Million PA Farm Bill Funded for Third Round*[Press release]. Retrieved from https://www.media.pa.gov/pages/agriculture_details.aspx?newsid=1108

⁶ Avila, C., Frakt, A. (2021). Raising the Minimum Wage and Public Health. *JAMA Health Forum*, 2(1). doi:10.1001/jamahealthforum.2020.1587

⁷ The Food Trust. (2020). *The Power of Produce in Pennsylvania*. http://thefoodtrust.org/uploads/media_items/the-power-of-produce-in-pennsylvania-1.original.pdf

⁸ Governor Tom Wolf. (2020, May 21). *Wolf Administration Awards \$9.6 million in Grants to Help the Charitable Food System*[Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.governor.pa.gov/newsroom/wolf-administration-awards-9-6-million-in-grants-to-help-the-charitable-food-system/>

⁹ Feeding Pennsylvania. (2021). *State Food Purchase Program*. https://47ecaf08-f099-48db-b0ac-43232f766d38.filesusr.com/ugd/30c384_611fc10e86754cf2b62ae98e63d95207.pdf

¹⁰ Feeding Pennsylvania. (n.d.). *PASS Pennsylvania Agricultural Surplus System*. https://47ecaf08-f099-48db-b0ac-43232f766d38.filesusr.com/ugd/30c384_caabb72d5315447b9c534f79691d7da6.pdf

¹¹ Food Research & Action Center. (2021). *The Case for Healthy School Meals for All*. <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/SchoolMealsForAll.pdf>

¹² Food Research & Action Center. (2021). *Summer and Afterschool Nutrition Program Legislation and Funding by State*. <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/Summer-and-Afterschool-Leg-Table-2021.pdf>