

# Healthy Food for a Healthy Pennsylvania

According to Feeding America, around 1.22 million Pennsylvanians, including 325,170 children, do not have enough food for a healthy life.<sup>1</sup> A diverse, equitable, and secure food system helps to ensure economic opportunity, environmental sustainability, and access to affordable, healthy foods.

## 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.<sup>2</sup> In the 2019-2020 fiscal year, Pennsylvania's legislature allocated \$24 million to PA Farm Bill programs. However, funding has since decreased in subsequent budget years, with the PA Farm Bill funded at \$13.8 million in Pennsylvania's 2023-24 budget.<sup>3</sup> It is important to either increase or maintain future funding levels.

## 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. Higher wages not only preserve dignity but also tackle food insecurity and help decrease health inequities. States that raise their minimum wages have better health outcomes than states that maintain the federal minimum wage.<sup>4</sup> Over 63,000 Pennsylvanians, mostly women, still make less than the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour.<sup>5</sup>

## 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. SNAP recipients in regions with Healthy Food incentives can use them at farmers markets to purchase additional fruits and vegetables, which also helps the local agricultural sector. Healthy Food Incentive programs exist in Cumberland and Perry Counties, but not in 52 of the other 67 Pennsylvania counties.<sup>6</sup> More funding is necessary to expand healthy food incentive programs to additional areas in the state.

### Provide grants to improve food assistance infrastructure

To meet the needs of underserved populations, we must invest more in food assistance infrastructure, including upgrading storage units and delivery vehicles. Most nonprofit organizations providing these services lack sufficient funds to support them. The state should provide grant funding for infrastructure investments, similar to the Department of Environmental Protection's 2019-2020 Food Recovery Infrastructure Grant.

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

During the pandemic, an additional one million Pennsylvanians sought help from food banks.<sup>7</sup> 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. The program has not received a substantial increase in funding for nearly 15 years. Food bank advocates are seeking

to increase funding for the Pennsylvania Agricultural Surplus System (PASS) from \$4.5 million to \$5 million.<sup>8</sup> By increasing funding and expanding eligibility, we can make sure that all Pennsylvanians have access to healthy food.

## 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.<sup>9</sup> School lunch and breakfast programs provide meals for nearly 30 million students, many who come from low-income families. Expanding federal programs would solve many problems for schools and students. Current eligibility criteria for assistance programs may exclude some food-insecure families, causing them to accumulate school meal debt. Students participating in free and reduced-cost meal programs are often stigmatized. Making every student eligible could reduce the substantial burden of administering these programs for schools.

### 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.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Feeding America. (2021). *Food Insecurity in Pennsylvania*. Retrieved February 16, 2024 from <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2021/overall/pennsylvania>.

<sup>2</sup> Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. (n.d.). *PA Farm Bill*. Retrieved October 26, 2021 from <https://www.agriculture.pa.gov/Pages/PA-Farm-Bill.aspx>.

<sup>3</sup> Governor Josh Shapiro. (2023, December 20). Governor Shapiro Gets Stuff Done: Supporting Pennsylvania Farmers and Agriculture, Expanding Broadband Access, & Investing in Rural Communities [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://governor.pa.gov/newsroom/governor-shapiro-gets-stuff-done-supporting-pennsylvania-farmers-and-agriculture-expanding-broadband-access-investing-in-rural-communities/>.

<sup>4</sup> Avila, C., Frakt, A. (2021). Raising the Minimum Wage and Public Health. *JAMA Health Forum*, 2(1). doi:10.1001/jamahealthforum.2020.1587.

<sup>5</sup> Analysis of the Pennsylvania Minimum Wage. March 2023. Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry. <https://www.workstats.dli.pa.gov/Documents/Minimum%20Wage%20Reports/Minimum%20Wage%20Report%202023.pdf>. Accessed December 12, 2023.

<sup>6</sup> The Food Trust. (2020). *The Power of Produce in Pennsylvania*. <https://thefoodtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/the-power-of-produce-in-pennsylvania-1.original.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Feeding Pennsylvania. (2021). *State Food Purchase Program*. [https://47ecaf08-f099-48db-b0ac-43232f766d38.filesusr.com/ugd/30c384\\_611fc10e86754cf2b62ae98e63d95207.pdf](https://47ecaf08-f099-48db-b0ac-43232f766d38.filesusr.com/ugd/30c384_611fc10e86754cf2b62ae98e63d95207.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> Feeding Pennsylvania. (n.d.). *PASS Pennsylvania Agricultural Surplus System*. [https://47ecaf08-f099-48db-b0ac-43232f766d38.filesusr.com/ugd/30c384\\_caabb72d5315447b9c534f79691d7da6.pdf](https://47ecaf08-f099-48db-b0ac-43232f766d38.filesusr.com/ugd/30c384_caabb72d5315447b9c534f79691d7da6.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Food Research & Action Center. (2021). *The Case for Healthy School Meals for All*. <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/SchoolMealsForAll.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> 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>.