

Addressing Nutrition Insecurity with Fruits and Vegetables

Quick Facts

- **9 out of 10** Americans do not meet the 2020–2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans fruit and vegetable consumption recommendations
- **74%** of adults in America are overweight or obese
- **52 years** since there was a White House Conference on Nutrition and Hunger
- **5** bulk commodity varieties available in The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)
- **\$28 million** spent on TEFAP Fresh Produce Box program on fresh produce (out of more than \$500 million spent on food)

Background

The United States faces an obesity epidemic that has only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Those with obesity are at triple the risk of hospitalization and are at a higher risk of death. Outside the threat of COVID, diet-related diseases including type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and cancer kill nearly 700,000 individuals a year and cost the domestic healthcare system approximately \$50 billion annually.

While there are multiple policy levers required to reverse our obesity epidemic and solve nutrition insecurity, there are two timely policy areas in which Congress and the Administration can make important progress: driving fruit and vegetable consumption through the upcoming White House Conference on Food, Nutrition and Hunger with a “Fruit and Vegetable Moonshot” and reforming the USDA procurement system to increase fresh fruit and vegetable access to those in need.

White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, Hunger and Health and a Fruit and Vegetable Moonshot

The 2022 conference holds the potential to drive a revolutionary and government-wide approach to unlocking nutrition security. A critical goal of this must be driving access and eliminating barriers to fruit and vegetables to ensure every American is meeting the Dietary Guidelines for Americans fruit and vegetable consumption recommendations. This is our “Fruit and Vegetable Moonshot” and will require

cross-governmental approaches with a unified, focused goal. Implementing a federal strategy for produce prescriptions within the healthcare system, embedding a fruit and vegetable benefit within the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and ensuring transparent and non-deceptive labeling through the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), are but a few options that can help achieve the Fruit and Vegetable Moonshot.

Reforming the USDA Fresh Produce Procurement System

USDA’s long-standing model for food procurement in The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) is simply not built to be inclusive of perishable fresh fruits and vegetables. Today, only five varieties of bulk fresh fruits and vegetables are available, and less than \$30 million a year is spent through the TEFAP Fresh Produce Box program. The Fresh Produce Procurement Reform Act (H.R. 5309) would reform and modernize the procurement

program to ensure that clients of emergency feeding sites have access to the full bounty of domestically produced fresh fruits and vegetables in a variety consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. As we work towards the Farm Bill, Congress should look towards opportunities to ensure that a wide variety of fresh produce has a place in USDA procurement programs.