



WASHINGTON STATE'S Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive Grant



Final Report

April 2015 to December 2019



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Executive Summary

The U.S. Department of Agriculture *Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentives* (FINI) grant made it possible for the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) and dozens of partners statewide to prioritize healthy food access and affordability for individuals and families experiencing food insecurity. Under the FINI grant (April 2015 to December 2019) **\$5,270,580** worth of fruit and vegetable incentives were redeemed by participants in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)¹.

Department of Health and partners tested three types of SNAP incentive programs, and found that all three showed promise in increasing the purchase of fruits and vegetables among SNAP shoppers:

■ Farmers Market SNAP Incentives

When shoppers spent their SNAP benefits at participating farmers markets, they received additional tokens or vouchers to spend on fruit and vegetables at the market. In the final year of the FINI grant, 93 farmers markets and farm stands in 21 counties offered SNAP incentive programs. These markets processed 130,759 SNAP transactions, valued at \$2,069,202, and redeemed **\$1,609,133** in SNAP incentives.

● Fruit and Vegetable Prescriptions (Rx)

Health care providers, community health workers, and community nutritionists from 16 health systems prescribed fruits and vegetables to SNAP participants. The prescription (Rx) was a paper voucher that recipients could use like cash to buy fruits and vegetables at participating farmers markets and grocery stores. Throughout the FINI project, SNAP participants redeemed **\$911,342** worth of produce prescriptions at participating farmers markets and grocery stores.

▲ Complete Eats Fruit and Vegetable Coupons

At 170 Safeway stores, shoppers who bought at least \$10 worth of fruits and vegetables using their SNAP benefits and Safeway Club Card received a coupon for \$5 off their next purchase of fruits and vegetables. Complete Eats launched in June 2017, and throughout the FINI grant, SNAP participants redeemed **\$2,750,105** worth of fruit and vegetable coupons at participating grocery stores.

Fruit and vegetable incentives increased the purchase of fruits and vegetables at local farmers markets and grocery stores while expanding access and affordability of healthy foods for Washington families living on a tight budget. By making fruits and vegetables more affordable, incentives helped families eat more healthfully and improve their nutrition. Improved nutrition reduces risk of chronic disease.

The following report provides an outcome summary for Washington's FINI grant from April 2015 to December 2019.

¹ SNAP benefits are known as Basic Food Program in Washington, and sometimes referred to as Food Stamps.



Background

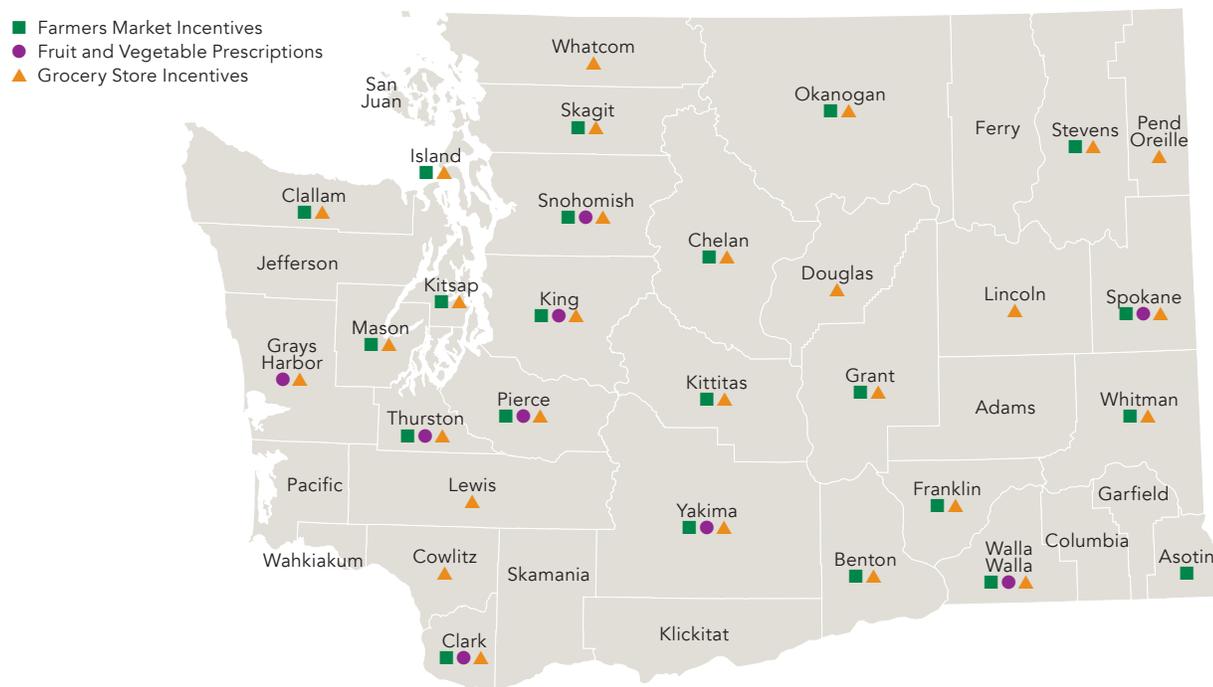
Access to affordable, healthy foods is often challenging for the most vulnerable of populations, including individuals living with limited incomes, racial and ethnic minorities, and older adults. In 2018, one in ten Washington households struggled with food insecurity — limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods.¹ Research shows that food insecurity is associated with poor dietary quality, as well as clinical hypertension, diabetes, and other chronic diseases.^{2,3,4} Participation in SNAP significantly reduces food insecurity.⁵ In state fiscal year 2019, nearly 842,000 people in Washington used the Basic Food program; 34 percent of Basic Food recipients were children.⁶

To address food insecurity and access to affordable, healthy food, DOH and partners implemented SNAP incentive programs between 2015 and 2019, with support from U.S. Department of Agriculture *Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentives* (FINI) grant.

The programs provided financial incentives to Washington SNAP participants to purchase fruit and vegetables at participating farmers markets and grocery stores. Programs included Farmers Market SNAP Incentives, Fruit and Vegetable Prescriptions (Rx), and Complete Eats Fruit and Vegetable Coupons – see **Figure 1**. The [FINI Progress Report](#) provides details on the infrastructure DOH and partners used to implement and evaluate FINI-funded incentives. Page 12 lists Key Partners.

As a result of the benefits demonstrated by FINI grant partnerships and programs, the Washington State Legislature passed SHB 1587 during the 2019 legislative session, creating a state-funded Fruit and Vegetable Incentive Program administered by DOH.

Figure 1 Washington Counties With FINI Programs



- 1 www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/94849/err-270.pdf
- 2 Seligman, H., Laraia, B., & Kushel, M. (Feb. 2010). Food Insecurity is Associated with Chronic Disease among Low-Income NHANES Participants. *The Journal of Nutrition*, 140(2), 304-310. Retrieved January 2018, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2806885/>.
- 3 Gregory, C., Coleman-Jensen, A. Food Insecurity, Chronic Disease, and Health Among Working-Age Adults, ERR-235, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, July 2017. Retrieved January 2018, from <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/84467/err-235.pdf?v=42942>.
- 4 Hanson, K. & Connor, L. (2014). Food Insecurity and Dietary Quality in US Adults and Children: A Systematic Review. *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 100 (2), 684-692. Retrieved February 2018 from, <https://doi.org/10.3945/ajcn.114.084525>.
- 5 Mabli J., Ohls J., et al. Measuring the Effect of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participation on food insecurity. Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, August 2013. Retrieved January 2018, from <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/Measuring2013.pdf>.
- 6 www.dshs.wa.gov/sites/default/files/ESA/briefing-manual/2019Basic_Food_Assistance.pdf

Farmers Market SNAP Incentives

In 2015, DOH began funding SNAP incentive programs at farmers markets through the FINI grant. Customers used their SNAP food benefits to buy SNAP-eligible items and received bonus tokens or vouchers to spend on fruits and vegetables. The amount of tokens or vouchers varied from market to market. For example, some markets offered a dollar-for-dollar match up to \$10, while others matched \$2 for every \$5 spent using SNAP benefits.



Impact

Providing SNAP incentives in farmers markets increased fruit and vegetable purchases by SNAP shoppers. Between 2015 and 2019, \$2,069,202 in SNAP benefits and \$1,609,133 of SNAP incentives were redeemed by SNAP participants in farmers markets. The overall economic impact of SNAP and incentives spent in farmers markets was \$5,664,635, based on USDA's estimate that for every \$1 of SNAP benefits spent, \$1.54 is generated in the local economy.¹

Figure 2
\$2,069,202 SNAP Benefits and \$1,609,133 SNAP Incentives were Spent at Farmers Markets between April 2015–December 2019

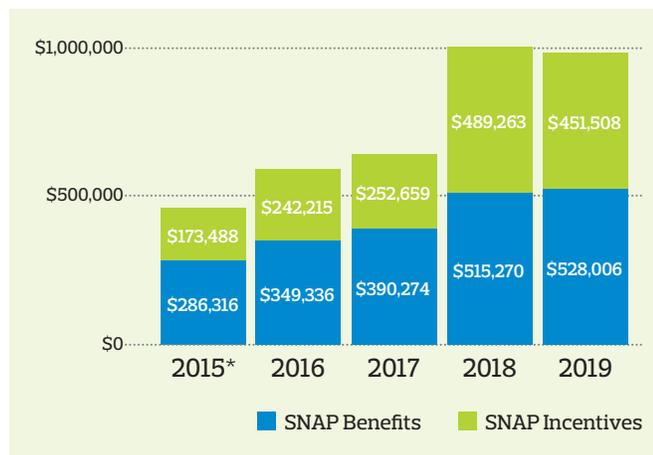


Table 1
SNAP and Incentive Transactions, April 2015–December 2019

Number of SNAP transactions at participating farmers markets	130,759
Amount of SNAP benefits spent at participating farmers markets	\$2,069,202
Amount of SNAP incentives spent at participating farmers markets	\$1,609,133
Total amount of SNAP benefits and incentives spent at participating farmers markets	\$3,678,344
Average amount of SNAP benefits spent per transaction	\$15.82

SNAP participants who used farmers markets SNAP incentives were invited to take a voluntary online survey. From June 2018 to February 2019, 80 SNAP participants responded to the survey and most reported positive impacts as a result of using farmers market SNAP incentives.

- 79% reported being less likely to run out of food
- 86% reported eating more fruit and vegetables
- 61% reported family members ate more fruit and vegetables



¹ www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/93529/err265_summary.pdf?v=8010.7#:~:text=80%20to%20%241.50,for%20SNAP%20to%20be%201.5.

Table 2
SNAP Participants Who Used Farmers Market SNAP Incentives, April 2015–December 2019

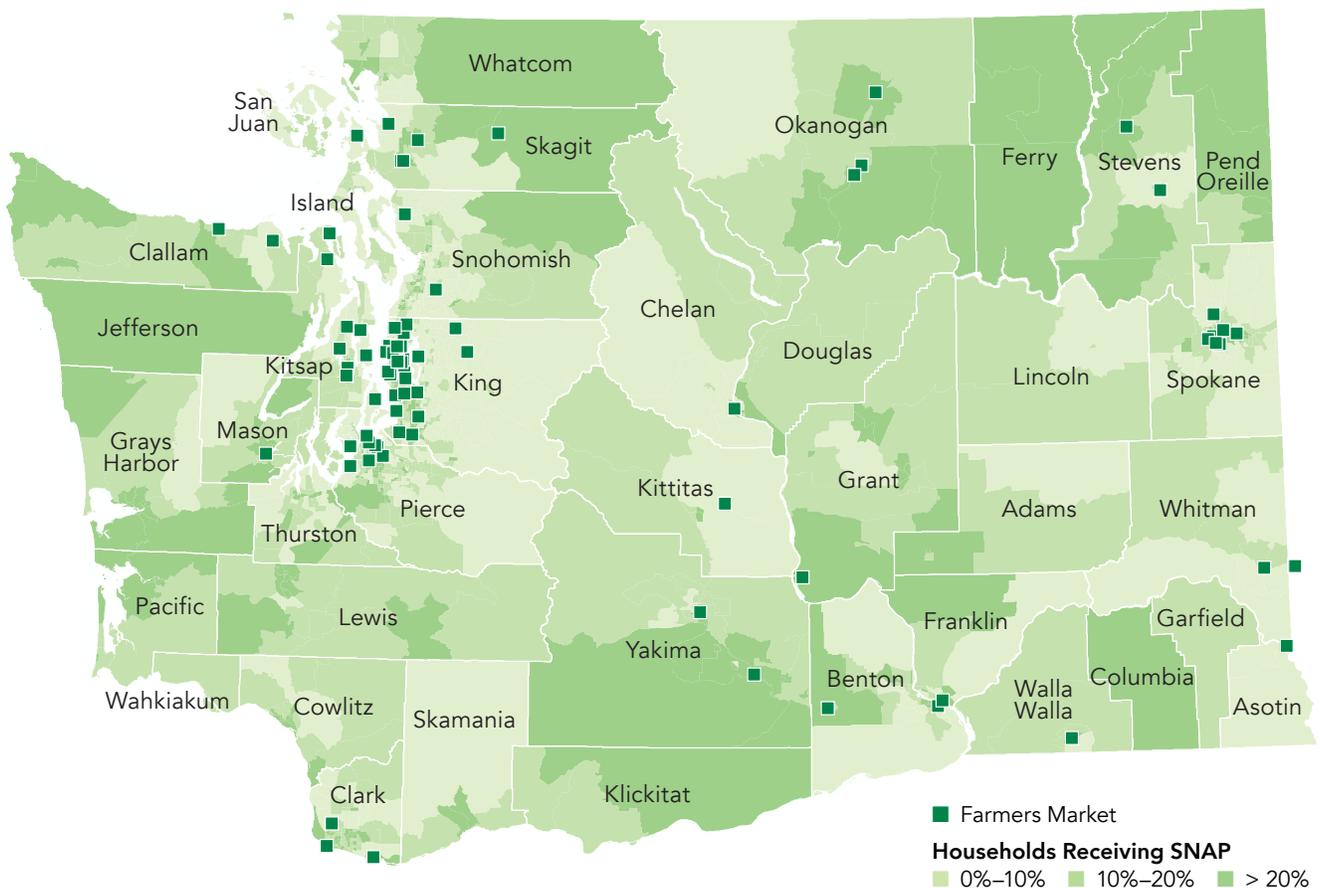
Number of unique SNAP participants who used SNAP and incentives at participating farmers markets	25,219
Number of SNAP participants who used SNAP and incentives at participating farmers markets more than 1 time	8,834
Number of SNAP participants who spent \$25 or more per transaction	7,412

Ninety-three farmers markets in 21 counties offered FINI-funded SNAP incentives in 2019, a 94 percent increase from 2015, when only 48 markets participated.



Participants in the SNAP Ambassadors program, Tacoma Farmers Market.

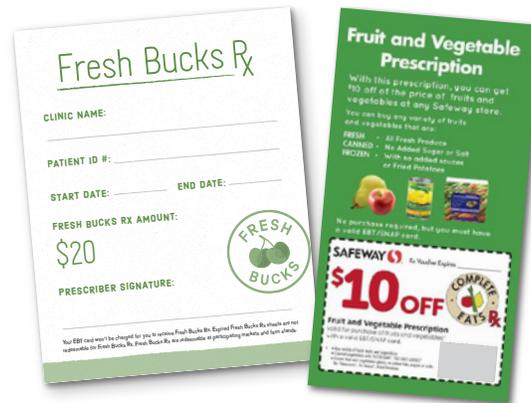
Figure 3
Percentage of Households Receiving SNAP by Census Tract and Location of Farmer’s Markets Offering FINI Programs²



² Sources: SNAP data: American Community Survey, 2014–2018; farmer’s market data: Department of Health SNAP Nutrition Education (SNAP-Ed) and Healthy Eating Active Living Programs, December, 2019

Fruit and Vegetable Prescriptions

The FINI grant allowed DOH and partners to test three distinct fruit and vegetable prescription (Rx) programs. At select health care and community sites, care providers distributed fruit and vegetable Rx, paper vouchers that patients could use like cash to buy fruits and vegetables at participating farmers markets and grocery stores.



Impact

DOH and partners were successful at increasing fruit and vegetable purchases by SNAP shoppers by providing FINI incentives through Fruit and Vegetable Prescriptions. Between 2015 and 2019, \$911,342 of fruit and vegetable prescriptions were redeemed by SNAP participants.

Table 3
Fruit and Vegetable Prescription Use by Program, April 2015–December 2019

Fruit and Vegetable Rx Program	Value of Rx Issued	Value of Rx Redeemed	Rx Redemption Rate	Number of Patients Who Redeemed Rx
Complete Eats Rx ¹	\$955,560	\$595,780	62%	8,787
Fresh Bucks Rx ²	\$420,050	\$263,102	63%	N/A
Small Steps Rx ³	N/A	\$52,460	N/A	N/A
Total		\$911,342		7,412

¹ Administered by DOH, began operating in July 2016.
² Administered by City of Seattle Office of Sustainability and Environment, began operating in July 2016.
³ Administered by UnitedHealthcare Community Plan, operated 2015–2018.

SNAP participants who used the fruit and vegetable prescriptions were invited to take a voluntary online survey. From September 2017 to June 2018, 144 SNAP participants responded to the survey and most reported positive impacts as a result of using fruit and vegetable prescriptions.

- 74% reported being less likely to run out of food
- 88% reported eating more fruit and vegetables
- 76% reported family members ate more fruit and vegetables
- 72% reported being better able to manage their health conditions

By the end of 2019, 15 health care and public health agencies offered fruit and vegetable Rx to their patients:

Partners Offering Both Complete Eats and Fresh Bucks Rx to patients:

- Harborview Medical Center
- Seattle Children’s Odessa Brown Children’s Clinic

Complete Eats Rx Partners:

- Grant County Health District
- MultiCare Health Systems’ Center for Healthy Living
- Nisqually Tribe Health Department
- Sea Mar Community Health Centers
- Spokane Regional Health District
- Verdant Health Commission
- Virginia Mason Memorial Hospital
- Yakima Neighborhood Health Services
- Yakima Valley Farm Workers Clinics

Fresh Bucks Rx Partners:

- Kaiser Permanente
- Neighborcare Health
- Public Health Seattle-King County
- Seattle Indian Health Board

Complete Eats Fruit and Vegetable Coupons

In 2017, DOH and Safeway launched Complete Eats in 170 Safeway stores across Washington state. Safeway customers who used SNAP food benefits to buy \$10 of fresh, canned, or frozen fruits and vegetables without added fats, sugars, or salt received a \$5 coupon to buy fruits and vegetables with their next purchase. The coupons expired after one month.

The FINI grant allowed DOH and Safeway to offer Complete Eats from June 2017 to July 2018. The program restarted in December 2018 with funding from a private foundation, and continued to operate through 2019 with a mix of private and state funding.



Impact

DOH and partners successfully increased fruit and vegetable purchases by SNAP shoppers by offering fruit and vegetable incentives in grocery stores. In the first year of Complete Eats, SNAP participants who used Complete Eats coupons spent 15 percent more on fruit and vegetables compared to the year before Complete

Eats started. By the end of 2019, \$2,750,105 of Complete Eats coupons were redeemed by SNAP participants in grocery stores. The overall economic impact of SNAP incentives spent in grocery stores was \$4,235,162 based on USDA's estimate.¹

Table 4 Complete Eats Coupon Redemption, June 2017–December 2019

	2017 ¹	2018 ²	2019 ³	Total
Number of Coupons Distributed	466,921	768,329	978,833	2,214,083
Number of Coupons Redeemed	96,821	202,736	250,464	550,021
Amount of Coupons Redeemed	\$484,105	\$1,013,680	\$1,252,320	\$2,750,105
Redemption Rate of Coupons	21%	26%	26%	25%
Economic Impact of Coupons Redeemed	\$745,522	\$1,561,067	\$1,928,573	\$4,235,162

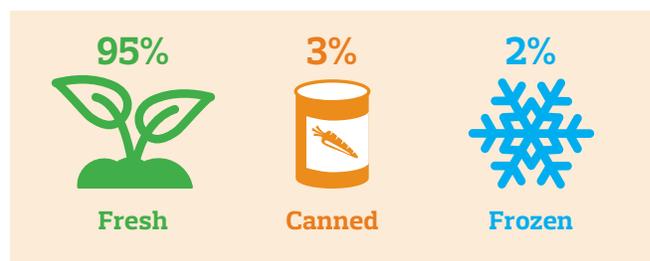
1 June–December 2017, Complete Eats launched June 2017.
 2 January–July, and December 2018, Complete Eats did not operate August–November.
 3 January–December 2019.

Purchasing patterns show SNAP participants preferred to buy fresh produce with their Complete Eats coupon.

Table 5 Top 10 Fruit and Vegetable Purchased, June 2017–December 2019

Banana	Bell Pepper
Strawberry	Cucumber
Avocado	Navel Orange
Clementine	Red Grape
Tomato	Lime

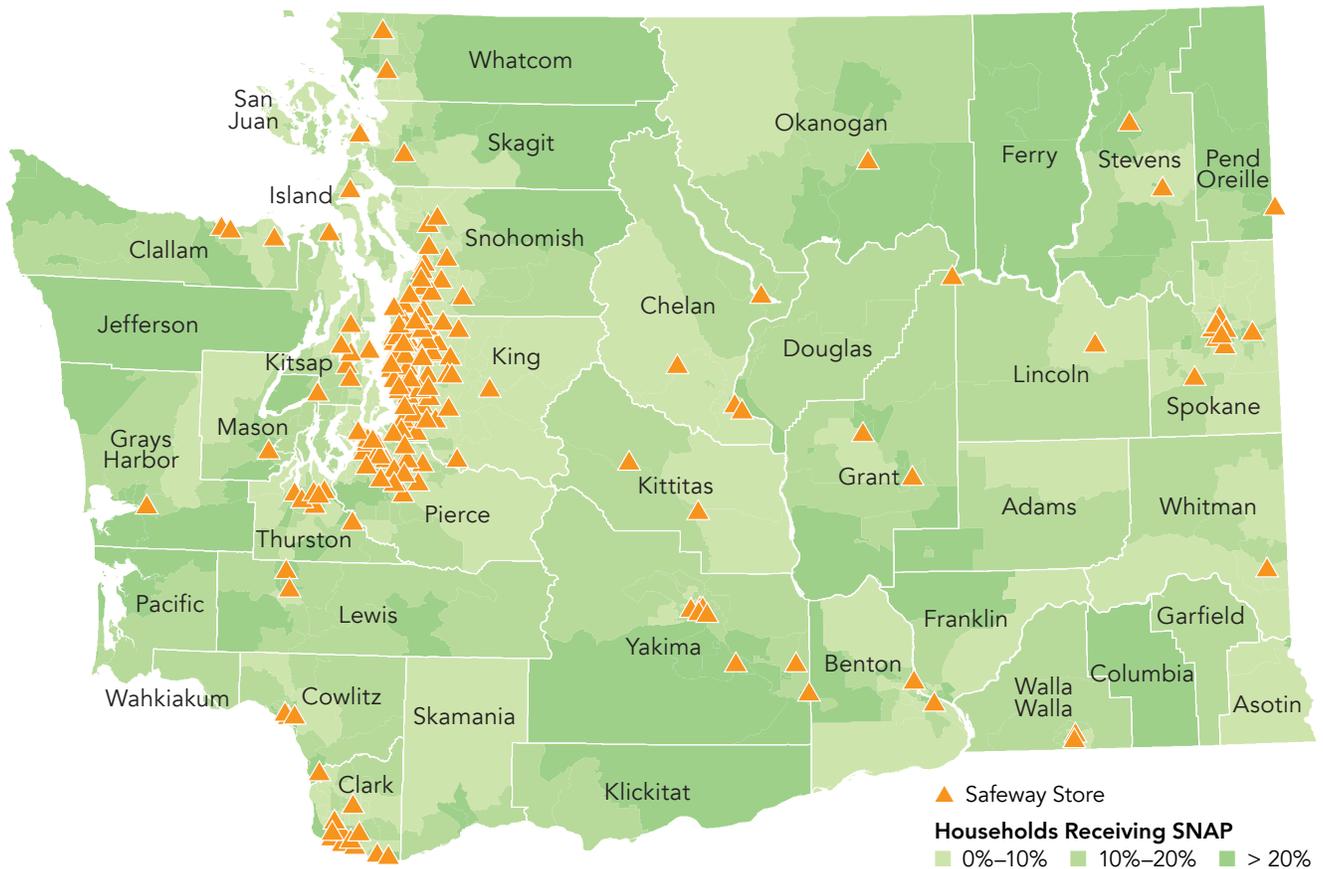
Figure 4 Percent of Fruit and Vegetables Purchased by Fresh, Canned, and Frozen Categories, June 2017–December 2019



1 ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/93529/err265_summary.pdf?v=8010.7#:~:text=80%20to%20%241.50,for%20SNAP%20to%20be%201.5



Figure 5 Percentage of Households Receiving SNAP by Census Tract and Location of Supermarkets Offering FINI Programs²



² Sources: SNAP data: American Community Survey, 2014–2018; Supermarket data: Department of Health SNAP Nutrition Education (SNAP-Ed) and Healthy Eating Active Living Programs, December, 2019

Conclusion

We found that offering fruit and vegetable incentives to families living on a tight budget was an effective way to increase the purchase of fruit and vegetables at participating farmers markets and grocery stores. By making fruit and vegetables more affordable, incentives helped families eat more healthfully and improve their nutrition. Under the FINI grant, \$5,270,580 worth of fruit and vegetable incentives were redeemed by SNAP participants. By 2019, 263 farmers markets and grocery stores offered SNAP incentives funded through FINI, a 448% increase from 2015, when only 48 farmers markets offered SNAP incentives.

The positive feedback from SNAP participants who used farmers market SNAP incentives and fruit and vegetable prescriptions show these incentives had a meaningful impact on individuals and families experiencing limited resources.

Growth in participation among partners and participants during the grant period indicated that the incentives offer value to communities.

Prioritizing healthy food for people did not stop when the FINI grant ended. In 2019, the Washington State Legislature passed Substitute House Bill 1587, creating a state-funded Fruit and Vegetable Incentive Program administered by the Department of Health. The Fruit and Vegetable Incentive Program uses lessons learned from the FINI grant to refine incentive programs:

- **SNAP Market Match** In 2020, the Department of Health launched a statewide farmers market program called SNAP Market Match. The program takes the place of regional farmers market SNAP incentives that operated under the FINI grant, and matches SNAP benefits dollar-for-dollar.
- **Fruit and Vegetable Prescriptions (Rx)** In 2020, the Department of Health is working with 12 health care and public health agencies to distribute fruit and vegetable prescriptions to 2,000 food insecure patients who have or are at-risk of developing a chronic condition (e.g., diabetes, obesity) with a six-month benefit worth \$250 for fruit and vegetables. The prescriptions are redeemable at Safeway stores.
- ▲ **Complete Eats Fruit and Vegetable Coupons** In 2020, the fruit and vegetable coupons being distributed and redeemed at Safeway stores changed to a \$3 coupon (it was previously \$5) to ensure the program funds do not run out.

Department of Health will continue to collaborate with local, state, and national partners to implement and evaluate incentive programs.

Washington FINI Subawardees

Eleven organizations received federal grant dollars and contributed the majority of in-kind match to implement FINI programming.

- Catholic Charities of Spokane
- City of Seattle's Office of Sustainability and Environment
- Kitsap Public Health District
- MultiCare Health System's Center for Healthy Living
- Safeway/Albertsons
- Skagit Valley Farmers Market Coalition
- Spokane Regional Health District
- UnitedHealthcare Community Plan
- University of Washington Center for Public Health Nutrition
- Virginia Mason Memorial Hospital
- Washington State University – Clark County Extension

Statewide Advisory Network

In addition to the lead implementing partners, the Department of Health gathered dozens of strategic partners to serve as an Advisory Network throughout the life of the FINI grant. The FINI Advisory Network included a cross-sector network of representatives from state and local government agencies, health care systems, public health foundations, universities, and community-based organizations. This network morphed into the Fruit and Vegetable Incentives Advisory Network after the FINI grant funding ended, and continues to convene and provide guidance and support for the ongoing efforts to incentivize fruit and vegetable purchases among low-income shoppers.

- American Heart Association
- Anti-Hunger and Nutrition Coalition
- Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition
- Department of Agriculture
- Department of Health
- Department of Social and Health Services
- Empire Health Foundation
- Foundation for Healthy Generations
- Governor's Council on Health Disparities
- Governor Jay Inslee's Office
- Northwest Harvest
- Senator Patty Murray's Office
- State Board of Health
- University of Washington Center for Public Health Nutrition
- Washington State Alliance of YMCAs
- Washington State Farmers Market Association

Related Publications and Presentations

Atkinson, B, Auvinen, A. Nutrition Prescription: Using Public-Private Partnerships to Develop Novel Food Insecurity Solutions. Presentation at Food and Nutrition Conference and Expo 2019; October 2019; Philadelphia, PA.

Auvinen, A and Jacobson M. Fruit and Vegetable Rx: A Nexus for Health Care, Public Health and the Food System. Presentation at the Washington State Public Health Association Conference; 2018 October 17; Wenatchee, WA.

Auvinen A, Marcinkevage J, Nambuthiri S. Public Health Implications of a Large-Scale Multi-Sector Produce Prescription Program. Panel session presented at American Public Health Association Annual Conference; 2018 November 13; San Diego, CA.

Flores K and Igoe B. Synergies between Washington State's Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive Project & WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program. Oral presentation at the National Association of Farmers' Market Nutrition Program Annual Conference; 2016 Sept. 9; Juneau, AK.

Igoe B, McDermot D, Stahre M. Strengthening the Connection Between the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and Farmer's Markets. *Prev Chronic Dis* 2016; 13:160186. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5888/pcd13.160186>.

Marcinkevage J, Auvinen A, Nambuthiri, S. Washington's Fruit and Vegetable Prescriptio Program: Improving Affordability of Healthy Foods for Low-Income Patients. *Prev Chronic Disease* 2019; 16:180617. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5888/pcd16.180617>.

Marcinkevage J, Nambuthiri S, Auvinen A. Fruit and Vegetable Prescriptions Improve Access to Healthy Foods Among Food Insecure Individuals—Washington State, 2016-17. Presentation at Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists (CSTE) Annual Conference; 2018 June 10-14; West Palm Beach, FL.

Marcinkevage J, Nambuthiri S, Igoe B. Washington State's Large-scale FINI Project. Panel session presented at American Public Health Association Annual Conference; 2016 Oct. 29–Nov. 2; Denver, CO.

Marcinkevage, J. Fruit and Vegetable Coupons Increase Healthy Food Access for Low-Income Shoppers in Washington State. Panel session presented at American Public Health Association Annual Conference; 2019 November; Philadelphia, PA.

Nambuthiri S, Marcinkevage J, Auvinen A. Washington State Farmers Market Incentive Programs Promote Purchase of Healthy, Local Food by SNAP Participants. Presentation at Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists (CSTE) Annual Conference; 2018 June 10-14; West Palm Beach, FL.

Nambuthiri, S, Marcinkevage J, Igoe B. Washington State Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) Initiative: Year 1 Update. Poster session presented at CSTE Annual Conference; 2017 June 7; Boise, ID.

Riemer, S., Walkinshaw, L., Auvinen, A., Marcinkevage, J., Daniel, M. Jones-Smith, J. A Qualitative Study on Participant Perceptions of a Supermarket Fruit and Vegetable Incentive Program. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*. Submitted March 2020.

Wells J. Washington State's Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) Grant. Oral presentation at the Washington State Farmers Market Association Annual Conference; 2017 Feb. 2; Blaine, Washington.

Washington State Department of Health. Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive reports and factsheets. Available online: www.doh.wa.gov/FVIP.

For more information, contact FVIP@doh.wa.gov or visit www.doh.wa.gov/FVIP.



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