

Quarterly Food Systems Updates from Colorado State Agencies

Q2 (April-June) 2024

As part of the quarterly meetings of the Colorado Food Systems Advisory Council (COFSAC), our members representing state agencies provide updates on new and ongoing policies and programs related to food systems. These high-level briefings are one of the ways our council's efforts support cross-sector collaboration and coordination, and timely communication across our Colorado food system initiatives.

Colorado Department of Agriculture (CDA)

[Next Generation Ag Leadership Program](#) open now through May 2 at 5pm. Awards to be announced in June.

[Community Food Access](#)- Round 2 award announcements will be made early May. Tax credit program materials in development; tax credit specific webpage will have more information. Site visits for Round 1 awardees are taking place, providing a great opportunity to see the impact of these funds.

[Resilient Food System Infrastructure](#) grant closes May 1. Reviewers had initiate meeting and will be reviewing proposals in the middle of May, selected proposals will be sent to USDA AMS by the end of May for review.

CO Proud & Publications

40th anniversary Farm Fresh Directory will be going to the printer in May; ready to distribute starting early June. English and Spanish version available. Please let [Danielle Trotta](#) or [Loretta Lopez](#) know if you are interested in distributing copies.

Climate Smart Marketing

New staff began in April in Conservation and Markets Divisions. Developing strategies for marketplace opportunities for producers. Working with National STAR program.

CDA Food Systems Bill Tracking

- Authorizing Direct-to-Consumer Sales of Raw Milk - SB24-[043](#)
- Agricultural Workforce & Suicide Prevention - SB24-[057](#)
- Agricultural & Rural Behavioral Health Care - SB24-[055](#)
- HB24-[1138](#) Tax Credit for Transfer of Agricultural Asset
- HB24-[1249](#) Tax Credit Agricultural Stewardship Practices

Colorado Department of Education (CDE)

HSMA legislation (long bill + orbital bill)

Program is successful and students are eating but the state is paying more than expected.

- Breakfast increase 37%
- Lunch increase 32%

- Paid 105% breakfast increase
- 62% increase in lunch

State reimbursement based on paid \$1.90 breakfast and \$3.85 lunch so this adds up quickly

- The Joint Budget Committee met 3/18 to discuss next steps with HSMA
- They voted to fund meal reimbursements for this current school year and next school year
- They also voted to move ahead with a new bill to:
 - Delay implementation of the grant programs (expanded LFP, wages/stipends, TA grant)
 - Change grant programs to be subject to available state funding
 - Extend the Local Food Program Pilot that CDE has had in place the past few years
 - Add greater flexibility for when schools are required to opt into CEP
 - Give CDE authority to mandate best practices for collecting household income forms for participating districts (in the past CDE provided best practices to districts but this allows us to provide corrective action in a review that would require districts to create a corrective plan of action)
 - Have CDE create and oversee a Technical Assistance Working Group with final report due in December
 - identify ways to maximize federal funding; reduce costs of the program and review cost-saving options; strengthen the long-term resiliency of the Healthy School Meals Cash Fund; model revenue scenarios; and provide options for balancing program revenues and expenditures in the most equitable way for students and school food authorities
- CDE hired a contractor to do a deep dive analysis into ways to maximize federal funding, final report/recommendations should be available end of May and will help is determine when it is most beneficial to be on CEP and help with site groupings to maximize funding
- The bill passed and CDE is waiting on the final

*Local Food Program pilot extension-for the 24/25 school year \$500,000 for local food purchases and \$150,000 for a technical assistance grant. Applications will be open the month of May. Awarded districts will receive \$0.05 per lunch meal served in the 23/24 school year. Districts serving more than 2,150,000 meals are not eligible. Priority is given to districts serving less than 1,250,000 meals. CDE will need final meal counts from 23/24 before awards can be made to districts and funds are disbursed in October.

Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS)

Community Food Assistance Provider Grant Program

On April 29, Governor Polis signed HB 24-1407 that creates the Community Food Assistance Provider Grant Program. It appropriates \$3 million in FY 2024-25 to the Department to provide grants to food pantries and food banks to serve households seeking food resources. The bill enables the Department to contract with a third-party entity to administer the program.

Summer EBT

Congress authorized this new permanent food assistance program to provide resources to students to purchase food in the summer months, when school is not in session. The program was officially codified in Colorado during Gov. Polis' extraordinary session (Nov. 2023.) The program is being jointly managed between the Colorado Departments of Education and Human Services, who worked closely to develop a State Plan. On May 2, the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture notified Colorado that our program plan to operate Summer EBT in 2024 is officially approved. As such, Colorado is on-track to issue S-EBT benefits (\$120 per eligible school-age child) in Summer 2024.

SNAP Energy EBT

SNAP Energy EBT (also known as "Heat & Eat") will provide an additional benefit (\$21) to qualified SNAP households to unlock additional SNAP benefits for households who do not pay an energy bill. The program is expected to launch in early fall 2024. Benefits will be made as a single (annual) cash payment on EBT cards. The benefits and program operation will be supported through an energy bill surcharge received from Energy Outreach Colorado. An interface to connect the Low-Income Energy Assistance Program (LEAP) with the SNAP data in the Colorado Benefits Management System (CBMS) was completed in December. It will enable the benefits to be targeted to the right households (i.e. those who are not receiving LEAP). The interface will also enhance more program outreach and connectivity between LEAP and SNAP.

eHIP (electronic- Healthy Food Incentive)

This program is similar to Double Up Food Bucks, providing a dollar-for-dollar incentive that promotes the purchase and consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables among SNAP households, up to \$60 per household per month. Qualifying purchases can be made at an array of participating pilot retailers and farmers markets. The program is tentatively scheduled for launch in Summer 2024.

SNAP

Program participation remains at an all-time high in Colorado and continues to increase. This can be attributed to a number of reasons including, but not limited to, the economic impact of the pandemic, cost of housing, increase in utility rates, and inflation reflected in the all-food consumer price index, and relatively stagnant wages in Colorado, coupled with targeted and effective efforts to increase access of SNAP benefits to more households that qualify. Since 2020, Colorado's SNAP caseload has increased more than 36%.

Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE)

Colorado Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (COWIC)

CDPHE is preparing for the WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) market season. The FMNP provides WIC participants over the age of 1 with a coupon booklet valued at a total of \$30, to buy fresh, unprepared, locally grown fruits, vegetables, and herbs (not potted or planted) at approved farmers' markets. Coupons must be used by October 31 each year. The [approved markets](#) remain in the same service area as last year. The website is being updated and WIC participants will receive a text message to sign up on May 8. CDPHE will begin mailing coupons on May 20.

Healthy Eating Active Living

CDPHE is working through a transition of the lead for the Farm to Child Collaborative due to staff transfer to another position.

2024 Legislative Session Bills (Food and Nutrition Security) of Interest to CDPHE

- HB24-1223 Improved Access to the Child Care Assistance Program
- HB24-1322 Medicaid Coverage Housing & Nutrition Services
- SB24-043 Authorizing Direct-to-Consumer Sales of Raw Milk
- HB24-1390 School Food Programs
- HB24-1416 Create the Healthy Food Incentives Program

Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT)

No Food Systems or Agriculture related updates to share at this time.