



California LFPA:

Building Food Security and Economic Opportunity through Collaboration

Farmers and agriculture production help drive the California economy – with food and agriculture accounting for 3% of the state’s GDP. The state’s producers grow over one-third of the vegetables in the United States and yet it doesn’t always reach those who need it most. Despite leading the nation in producing fresh fruits and vegetables, more than one in five Californians – about 8.8 million people or 23% of all households – struggle with food insecurity. In Yolo County, one of the state’s most agriculturally productive areas, a staggering 52.9% of households working in the agricultural industry reported resorting to food distributions to help feed their families in 2023.

The economic benefits of the food agriculture industry are also not shared by all the farmers and producers in the state. The industry is characterized by socioeconomic and racial inequality. Over 60% of the state’s total farm revenue is generated by only 2% of farms, and white farmers own the majority of farm acres. While farmers of color make up approximately 21% of farmers in California, they receive far fewer government resources such as grant funding and technical assistance than their white counterparts.

To link the state’s significant agricultural abundance to Californian families in need and help socially disadvantaged farmers reach new markets, leading

By the Numbers

\$60 million total LFPA allocation to support local farmers and producers in California

Over 300 California farmers engaged in the first year, the majority of whom identify as socially disadvantaged

34 participating food banks and **9 additional food access organizations** aim to reach **250,000 families** across the state

agricultural and hunger relief agencies and organizations joined forces to launch the Farms Together program. With resources from the USDA’s innovative Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program (LFPA), Farms Together was developed by the California Association of Food Banks (CAFB), Fresh Approach (FA), and the Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) with administrative support from the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) and the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA).



Through robust statewide coordination and collaboration, Farms Together is weaving a network of small and mid-scale family and socially disadvantaged farmers, food hubs, and aggregation partners with food banks and community food distributors to provide culturally relevant, locally produced food to families across the state. Farms Together aims to do three things:

- Help maintain and improve food and agricultural supply chain resiliency by building and expanding economic opportunities for small, local, and socially disadvantaged producers in California.
- Support state food banks and other community food distributors in procuring and distributing fresh, nutritious food from farmers for food- and nutrition-insecure community members.
- Create a transparent process designed for inclusion that is flexible to the needs and recommendations of local food system participants.

Creating New Market Access for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Food Businesses

Farms Together works primarily with food and farm businesses and/or non-profits who work directly with producers to bring fresh food to food banks and other community sites for distribution. To secure a contract for either a CSA-style box or a bulk order, these entities - mostly food hubs and other aggregation businesses - must first become an "Approved Vendor" through a clearly defined process. Applicants are screened and selected to become an Approved Vendor based on the fulfillment of eligibility criteria designed to help fulfill the program's goals. Contracts are then made available to Approved Vendors based on their ability to support priority farmers and meet their distribution partners' needs, notably not on lowest price. If awarded a contract, a minimum of 51% of purchases must come from socially disadvantaged farmers.

To ensure that the contracting process is open and transparent for everyone involved, Farms Together assigns an account manager who works with the Approved Vendors and the food banks and community food distributors they are paired with. The account manager meets regularly with both groups, including onboarding calls at the contract's start, weekly check-ins, and other calls or meet-ups as needed. These touchpoints, in addition to surveys at the beginning and end of each contract, help set clear expectations and provide consistent opportunities for feedback and process improvement.

“We’ve consistently heard from food bank clients that this program provides them with a dignified experience. They receive new produce that they may not have received before, and the product’s quality, freshness, and vibrancy helps them build a deeper connection and appreciation to their food and those who produce it.”
- Samiha Hamdi, Farms Together Program Manager



"It has been a great experience to participate in Farms Together. I received the contract at a very critical time of the year after the storms and winter season. As both a farmer and farm aggregator for the project, I have been able to support myself and many other small farmers in both growing and maintaining our businesses."
- Celsa Ortega, Induchucuiti Organic Farm [Translated from Spanish]

Strengthening Relationships Across the Supply Chain

To help strengthen relationships across the farm to food assistance value chain, Farms Together facilitates vendor-to-vendor networking, regionally and across the state. This networking enables food hubs and aggregation partners to share different models and best practices, collaboratively problem solve, and uncover the differences in their approaches while navigating similar challenges. The program connects single farms to larger groups of aggregating vendors to increase their sales channels and purchasing relationships. They also provide technical assistance to aggregating vendors and single-farm operators to strengthen their existing sales relationships.

By engaging the local food system at the community level, Farms Together is creating a new vision of a hunger relief system in California where there are new linkages between local food producers, food banks, and community food distribution organizations. The investment of the Local Food Purchase Assistance Program is making that vision a reality in California.

"Because the California project is so significant in scale, the best pathway to disperse the funds quickly and effectively was to prioritize contracting with groups in the middle of the supply chain, both formal food hubs, aggregating farms, and non-profit organizations that aggregate and distribute through a variety of programs. We think this not only is an effective model at reaching hundreds of farms, but also builds resiliency into these key agents of a strong food system. It helps spread funding, but also builds the logistical and technical capacity of these groups to grow and expand into other market channels."
- Andy Ollove, Farms Together Program Director



Additional Resources

For additional information, please visit www.farmstogether.org or contact Samiha Hamdi, Farms Together Program Manager, at samihahamdi@freshapproach.org

About LFPA

The USDA Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement (LFPA) is a transformative federal initiative that empowers state agencies, tribal governments, and their community partners to collaboratively source and distribute food, benefiting local socially disadvantaged producers and underserved communities. With a budget of \$900M, LFPA, led by the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service's Commodity Procurement Program, aims to strengthen regional food systems, support local and regional farms, and address hunger and food insecurity through partnerships with food assistance programs. This groundbreaking program has demonstrated its potential as a powerful investment in farms and communities in a short time since its inception in 2021.