



FIELD & FORK NETWORK

We connect communities to innovative solutions that foster a sustainable food system.

TESTIMONY

NEW YORK STATE JOINT BUDGET HEARING

HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE

January 31, 2024

Continued Investment in Double Up Food Bucks NY

*An Impactful Nutrition Incentive Program Addressing Food Insecurity
and Health Disparities Across New York State*

By Lisa French

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Introduction

Honorable Chairs and Members of the Senate and Assembly Social Services Committees, Senate Finance Committee and Assembly Ways & Means Committee. Thank you for allowing me to submit testimony on behalf of Field & Fork Network and our statewide nutrition incentive program Double Up Food Bucks NY for the SFY 2024-2025 State Budget. My name is Lisa French and I am the Co-founder and CEO of Field & Fork Network, a statewide non-profit organization dedicated to building a thriving regional food system that serves all New Yorkers. Double Up Food Bucks NY is a program that matches Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits \$1 for \$1 on local fresh fruits and vegetables, helping increase healthy food access for New Yorkers.

We respectfully request the Legislatures support of Level funding of a \$2 million budget appropriation for the Double Up Food Bucks NY program in this year's budget. This will unlock a federal match of \$2 million from the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program, as further explained below. The legislatures support of this funding in the FY 2024-2025 budget will ensure New Yorkers get the food and nutrition they need to live healthy and productive lives and will help grow the Double Up program across New York State's communities, ensuring everybody in need can access fresh fruits and vegetables.

Both hunger and food insecurity are prevalent problems in communities all across NYS. Economic factors such as inflation and rising food costs are only exacerbating these issues. According to a 2023 report from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 14% of the NYS population, or 1 in 7 NY residents, rely on SNAP to help feed themselves and their families, and 10.3% of households were food insecure, meaning that their access to adequate food is limited by a lack of money and other resources¹. According to the NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) more than 2.8 million New Yorkers receive food-buying benefits through SNAP. Additionally, more than 58% of SNAP participants are in families with children, almost 51% of SNAP participants are in families with members who are elderly or have disabilities, and almost 38% are in working families. Double Up Food Bucks NY is a critical resource that helps families stretch their food dollars and put healthy food on the table.

Both hunger and food insecurity are prevalent problems in communities across this great state, and good foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables are vital to the health and well-being of all New Yorkers. Poor diets, described as those low in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, and high in red and processed meats and ultra-processed foods, are a leading risk factor for

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chronic disease globally². According to the NY Health Foundation, food insecurity is highly associated with worse health; nearly half of all food-insecure New Yorkers rate their health as poor or fair, 69% reported having at least one chronic illness, and more than half find it difficult to get the food they need³. In addition, a 2023 report out of the Office of the NYS Comptroller prepared by the Office of Budget and Policy Analysis stated that the consequences of food insecurity can be devastating, from increased incidence of chronic disease and other health effects to reduced academic performance to an inability to succeed at the workplace⁴.

Double Up Food Bucks NY is one solution to help mitigate these effects of hunger and food insecurity on the health of individuals and families. According to the Gretchen Swanson Center for Nutrition, nutrition incentive programs like Double Up Food Bucks NY can help to close the nutrition gap among low-income populations by increasing purchasing power and access to fresh fruits and vegetables⁵. They also note that nutrition incentive programs like Double Up Food Bucks NY utilize a statistically proven model to increase fruit and vegetable consumption among participants compared to the general population.

I understand one of your goals as state leaders is to ensure that no New Yorker goes hungry while also helping families who are facing hard financial times to move out of poverty. You understand the cost of hunger and the toll that diet-related health conditions take on individuals and the lost economic productivity it represents.

The Multiple Wins of Double Up Food Bucks NY

Our experience implementing Double Up Food Bucks NY has shown that matching SNAP benefits with incentives for locally and regionally grown fruits and vegetables is a cost-effective way to simultaneously reduce hunger, improve dietary health, and stimulate local food economies in a way that can create new job opportunities. Through this one intervention, we can meet immediate caloric needs and build a healthy population.

Since 2014, we have seen significant impact with the Double Up Food Bucks NY program:

- Served more than 100,000 SNAP recipients
- \$2.56 million of Double Up Food Bucks spent on NY produce
- More than \$4.03 million of healthy food sales redirected back into local economies
- Over 400 NYS farmers and food vendors directly benefit from the program as participating market vendors and wholesale produce suppliers

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- More than \$1.5 million distributed directly to NY farmers

Today, the program operates in 31 NY counties with plans to reach 57 counties by 2027. The range of food retail venues in which Double Up Food Bucks NY operates is broad and growing. We have expanded the program footprint to include farmers markets, farm stands, mobile markets, small retail, and large chain grocery stores all in communities that have SNAP recipients. Federal and private funding has allowed us to implement the program using innovative technology solutions that are safe, secure, and convenient for the Double Up Food Bucks NY shopper.

In this past year, we have made huge strides in growing and expanding the program into large chain grocery stores as well. We have partnered with stores such as Tops Friendly Markets and ACME Markets to meet more SNAP customers where they are shopping. In addition, we have also implemented an innovative coupon solution to completely eliminate the registration barrier for the program, enabling anyone who uses their EBT card to participate in the program automatically with no sign up required. This groundbreaking solution is significantly increasing access to the program for consumers while simultaneously increasing sales for businesses.

Unlocking Federal Funds with a Matching NYS Investment of \$2 Million

The USDA National Institute of Food & Agriculture has committed \$8 million through the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program to support Double Up Food Bucks NY over the next four years. Field & Fork Network successfully leveraged the state's \$2 million investment from fiscal year 2024 to unlock the first \$2 million in federal funding as required by the grant's non-federal match requirement.

Field & Fork Network is poised to unlock another \$2 million in federal funds to support Double Up Food Bucks NY. The unlocking of these federal funds, however, is contingent upon securing a commitment of an equal non-federal match of \$2 million by New York State. This means that an investment from NYS of \$2 million dollars for Double Up Food Bucks NY will become \$4 million dollars, allowing for further expansion into more regions of New York State, giving more SNAP shoppers access to the program.

This collaborative investment of state and federal dollars allows for the implementation of Double Up Food Bucks NY into more grocery stores providing increased access to healthier food

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options where most Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) shoppers purchase food for themselves and their families.

Conclusion

We are requesting that the state maintain level funding of \$2 million for the Double Up Food Bucks NY program in the FY 2025 NYS Budget.

We know that there is no silver bullet that will solve our hunger and health challenges. However, the state can continue to invest in Double Up Food Bucks NY with its proven positive impact on those in need.

We ask the Legislature to please support a \$2 million budget appropriation for Double Up Food Bucks NY. This will ensure New Yorkers get the food and nutrition they need to live healthy and productive lives. A \$2 million appropriation to Double Up Food Bucks NY would help grow the program across New York State's communities, ensuring everybody in need can access fresh fruits and vegetables.

Thank you,

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