



FIELD & FORK NETWORK

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

TESTIMONY

NEW YORK STATE JOINT BUDGET HEARING
ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

February 7, 2024

*Continued Investment in Double Up Food Bucks NY– An Impactful
Nutrition Incentive Program Addressing Food Insecurity and Providing
Economic Opportunities for Farmers Across NYS*

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Introduction

Honorable Chairs and Members of the Senate and Assembly Agriculture and Environmental Conservation 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 nutrition incentive program Double Up Food Bucks NY for the SFY 2024-2025 State Budget. My name is Lisa French. 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.

The wins of Double Up Food Bucks NY are three-fold: the program increases the accessibility and affordability of local, fresh fruits and vegetables for underserved families, creates new economic opportunities for NY farmers, and supports local economies. In order for a farmers market, grocery store, or other produce vendor to participate in the program, they must commit to procuring and selling NY-grown produce at their business, ensuring that the produce offered is fresh and local. This is a major benefit for NY farmers, as they become connected to additional vendors to grow their customer base and can increase the sale of their produce to help minimize food waste. Purchasing local fruits and vegetables can contribute to a more sustainable and environmentally friendly food system by minimizing transportation-related emissions, promoting biodiversity, and supporting sustainable farming practices. Since the start of the program in 2014, more than \$1.5 million has gone directly to NY farmers, and we have partnered with more than 400 farmers and produce vendors across NYS.

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It is well documented that nutrition incentive programs such as Double Up Food Bucks NY offer multiple benefits to not only the program participants, but the communities where they are offered as well. 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 vegetables¹. 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. In addition, research has shown that these programs lead to societal cost-savings, increased employment, farmer labor income and overall economic development².

I understand one of your goals as state leaders is to ensure that we not only provide fresh, healthy food to our families, but support the hard-working farms and farmers who make feeding NY citizens possible. Double Up Food Bucks NY helps to support both of these initiatives, while simultaneously providing an economic benefit for farmers and local economies as well.

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 directly benefit from the program as participating market vendors and wholesale produce suppliers
- More than \$1.5 million distributed directly to NY farmers

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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.

Double Up Food Bucks NY started in 2014 at just 7 regional farmers markets in Western New York. Today, there are over 220+ sites running the program, with more than 56 farmers markets and farm stands all across the state. We need to invest in our small and medium-sized farms to cultivate a resilient food system that benefits all New Yorkers.

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

Conclusion

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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 families, farmers and local economies.

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,

Lisa French
CEO, Field & Fork Network

References

- 1 <https://nutritionincentivehub.org/media/2uwl3ch/gusnip-y3-impact-findings-report.pdf>
- 2 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8621044/>