



FIELD & FORK NETWORK

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

New York State Joint Budget Hearing

Environmental Conservation

*Double Up Food Bucks New York:
An Impactful Nutrition Incentive Program
Addressing Food Insecurity, Health Disparities and
Bolstering Local Economies Across New York State*

By Lisa French
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Introduction

Thank you for allowing me to submit testimony on behalf of Field & Fork Network and our nutrition incentive program Double Up Food Bucks (Double Up). 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 is a program that matches Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits \$1 for \$1 on New York grown fresh fruits and vegetables, increasing healthy food access for New Yorkers. **We are asking New York State lawmakers to support a \$2 million budget appropriation that will allow Field & Fork Network to continue to sustain and expand the Double Up Food Bucks program across more communities in New York.**

Statewide Wins for Farmers and Families

Since its start in 2014, **the Double Up program has served 32,000+ SNAP households** with over 1.8 million pounds of fresh, healthy produce. Double Up currently operates at over 180+ sites across 30 counties and has generated more than \$2.9 million in healthy, local food sales. With more than **400+ farmers benefiting from the program**, Double Up is as much a local food program supporting local economies as it is an impactful nutrition incentive affording the healthiest foods to our most vulnerable populations.

Our most recent program evaluation shows that 96% of Double Up customers surveyed say they increased the amount of produce they consume because of the program, and 92% of Double Up shoppers reported that they are buying more fruits and vegetables for snacks since using the program. **At farmers markets**, we find that SNAP customers are maximizing the full potential of the program—**redemption rates top over 96%**. Many SNAP shoppers report that NYS produce in the markets is less expensive and of higher quality than where they usually shop, and that the selection is better. Farmers and market managers tell us SNAP shoppers that come to the markets for the first time to take advantage of the Double Up program continue to shop at the markets when they are no longer using SNAP. This is all important feedback. This tells us that Double Up participants are motivated shoppers who take nutrition and health seriously and work hard to get the best nutritional value for their very limited food dollars. It also indicates the **new, healthy shopping habits that form because of the Double Up program continue when families leave the SNAP program.**

Double Up prioritizes the purchase and consumption of New York grown produce. Farmers markets allow for direct connection between consumers and farms and remain a foundational part of the program. Field & Fork Network requires participating retail and grocery stores to commit to buying a minimum of 15% produce grown within NY. To ensure that this does not pose an undue burden to small businesses, Field & Fork Network assists grocery and small retail stores in sourcing, tracking, and reporting New York produce purchases.



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The Economic Contributions

Healthy food incentive programs like Double Up Food Bucks New York do far more than just reduce hunger and improve nutrition, they also support economic development and jobs. **Double Up provides increased purchasing power for low-income families who can stretch their food budgets further. These food dollars drive additional sales at grocery stores and farmers markets. Those sales, in turn, circulate in the local economy, providing a boost to workers, businesses, farmers, and communities all throughout New York's supply chain.**

A 2021 research report, *The Economic Contributions of Healthy Food Incentives*, highlights the findings of a team of economists at Colorado State University that support the notion that programs such as Double Up Food Bucks New York can provide significant economic benefits if they were expanded widely across New York State. This pioneering study shows that broad expansions of healthy food incentives would provide powerful returns on that investment –for families, grocers, and farmers, as well as more broadly among the state economies where such benefits are expanded.

Field & Fork Network was part of the coalition of nutrition incentive providers that participated in the study which yielded the following potential economic benefits if there was significant state-wide investment and expansion of the program:

- Every \$1 of incentives spent on farm-direct purchases (farmers markets/farm stands/CSA), will result in an estimated contribution of \$2.5 dollars to New York's economy. \$1 of incentives spent on food in retail stores will result in \$2.2 dollars to New York's economy.
- A potential of \$27 million - \$52 million annual increase in farmer income.
- Estimated employment contributions: \$500K - \$1 million in labor income to the agriculture sector; \$2 million - \$4 million in labor income to the food retail sector.

Nutrition Incentives Work

For the last 8 years, Double Up Food Bucks New York has had a proven record of improving participant's diets and economic opportunity. This unique feature of the nutrition incentive program has garnered unparalleled support from over 31+ corporate and private foundations in NY since 2016. These non-federal dollars were used as a required match to federal dollars from the USDA National Institute of Food & Agriculture's Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (formerly the Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive Program) – bringing in \$4.2 million of federal funding since 2016. However, we are reaching the threshold of non-federal funding available from private sources and without state support we are leaving millions of federal dollars on the table.

The proposed \$2 million in State funding will be leveraged to bring in an additional \$2 million in federal funding. These resources will give approximately 100,000 additional SNAP shoppers access to the program. The funding will allow the program to expand into approximately 50 additional program sites which will

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include small retail/grocery sites and farm direct sites, bringing the total number of program sites statewide to 230.

Our experience implementing Double Up Food Bucks New York 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 provide sustainable long-term support to families, businesses, and farmers.