



**MARCH
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Revolutionizing Food Assistance: Nourish Colorado's EBT Integration Initiative

**Nourish Colorado's Strategic Role in
Transforming Nutrition Incentives**

THE HEALTHY FOOD INCENTIVES MOVEMENT

Nourish Colorado is actively engaged in the burgeoning national movement to increase access to fresh and local produce through programs such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) produce incentives. This case study delves into the journey of conceptualizing and implementing the expansion of SNAP produce incentives and the integration of such incentives into the Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) payment system. This case study demonstrates Nourish Colorado's unique abilities to pilot a concept, listen to community feedback, lead state policy, and engage in federal advocacy in a unified way to sustain that concept. This work has aimed to address challenges and enhance accessibility for SNAP participants through community engagement and strong governmental and legislative relationships, to invoke transformative change in healthy food access work.

A COMMUNITY-CENTERED APPROACH:

Since the early 2000s here in Colorado, there has been increasing acknowledgment of the significance that SNAP incentives can have on promoting access to and consumption of fresh produce. Many farmers markets across the state were funding and piloting SNAP incentives for produce on their own at that time. Recognizing an opportunity to grow this movement, in 2015 Nourish Colorado convened farmers, markets, and advocates from across the state to envision a uniform, umbrella "Double Up Food Bucks Program" in Colorado. The program incentivizes SNAP recipients to purchase fresh produce from participating markets and retailers by providing a dollar-for-dollar match on SNAP benefits spent to buy more produce. The program typically provides shoppers with vouchers or receipts with a value to purchase more produce after they shop. Nourish Colorado spearheaded the Double Up Food Bucks Program in Colorado, with a focus on identifying and partnering with local farms, markets, and small retailers committed to providing fresh food access to everyone in their community.

As the program grew, Nourish committed to listening to and understanding the experiences of farmers and SNAP shoppers. In addition to annual community-based convenings, Nourish Colorado actively sought the input of SNAP shoppers through a series of virtual SNAP Listening Sessions in 2021. Over 270 SNAP shoppers registered for these sessions, which provided a platform for participants to voice their opinions and contribute to the enhancement of the Double Up Food Bucks program. A key finding of these listening sessions was that participants sought methods that were less stigmatizing and cumbersome at the point of purchase. This community feedback highlighted the need for innovative solutions to improve shopper experience and accessibility.

STRATEGIC STATE ADVOCACY

Inspired by the success of innovative models such as the Healthy Incentives Program in Massachusetts, Nourish Colorado began to lay the foundation to integrate SNAP incentives on to SNAP shopper's EBT cards. This innovative approach streamlines the redemption process and eliminates barriers faced by SNAP participants by allowing the extra produce incentive earned to be allocated right back on the EBT card, instead of being distributed through vouchers or receipts. The culmination of several years of listening to partners led to Nourish Colorado leading HB 22-1380 in spring 2022. This bill provided the foundation for the Department of Human Services (CDHS) to staff and build the technology for benefits to be earned and distributed on EBT cards. The bill, passed in June 2022, provided \$1 million to CDHS for use by the Office of Economic Security for EBT programming related to food assistance.



64%

SNAP participants are in families with children*



34%

SNAP participants in families with members who are older adults or are disabled*

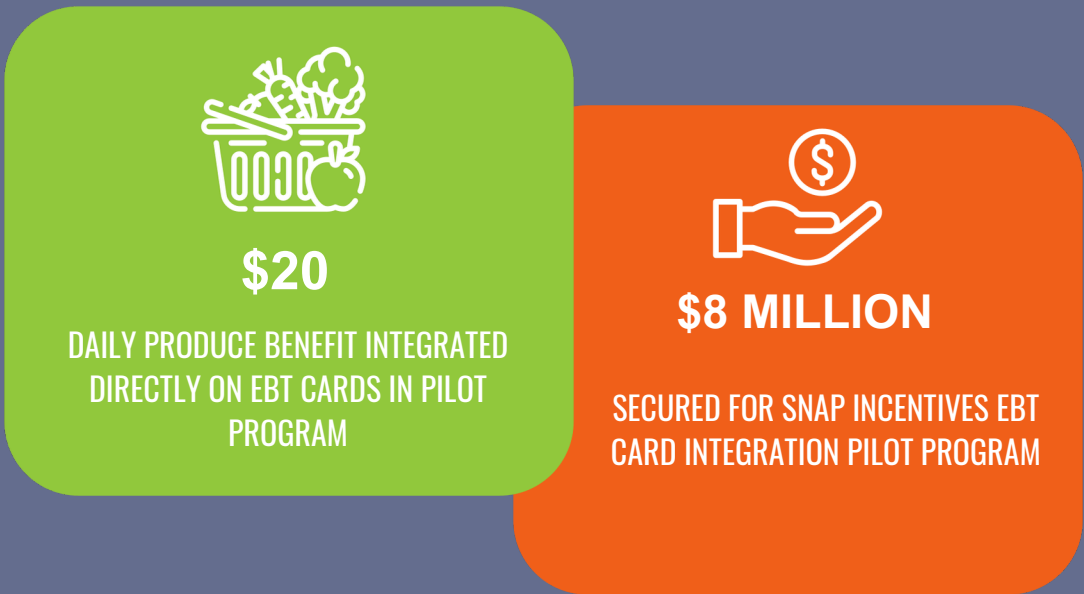
*2022

SECURING FEDERAL SUPPORT

Upon securing funding for state level back-end development, Nourish Colorado embarked on significant fundraising endeavors to secure funding for the millions of dollars in produce incentives that this new mechanism would support. Recognizing the importance of garnering support, Nourish Colorado initiated calls and meetings with key stakeholders such as the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to advocate for the necessity of an EBT integration program.

These efforts came to fruition when the USDA released a grant opportunity aimed at piloting EBT integration within state agencies. Though Nourish Colorado was not directly eligible for the grant, Nourish Colorado proactively engaged a grant writer to craft a proposal with CDHS. This initiative resulted in the successful acquisition of \$8 million for CDHS, earmarked for the pilot integration of EBT in 2024 through the Colorado SNAP Produce Bonus produce incentive program.

In tandem with securing funding, Nourish Colorado has initiated the piloting of EBT integration for Double Up Food Bucks Program sites across select locations in Colorado. This ongoing process demands meticulous planning, close coordination, and robust collaboration with retailers, farmers markets, and technology providers to ensure its success.



REFLECTIONS

In reflection, this case study illuminates the pivotal role played by Nourish Colorado in the integration of SNAP incentives with the EBT payment process. This narrative underscores the significance of adopting innovative methodologies to surmount barriers within food access initiatives. Through a multifaceted approach incorporating legislative advocacy, technological advancements, and robust community engagement, Nourish Colorado has contributed to a transformative shift in the SNAP incentives landscape for Coloradans. By embracing community-centered strategies, Nourish Colorado has not only addressed existing challenges but has also laid the groundwork for equitable access to fresh and nutritious foods for underrepresented communities across Colorado.

