

Growers, Grocers, and Public Health Call for Sustained Access to Fruits and Vegetables for WIC Families

For nearly fifty years, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) has played a critical role in expanding access to healthy foods to improve health outcomes at critical periods of growth and development. For decades, Congress has maintained a bipartisan commitment to fully fund WIC and assure any eligible individual can access the program's effective and targeted nutrition intervention.

In September 2021, Congress worked in a bipartisan fashion to implement science-based amounts for WIC participants to redeem fruits and vegetables, as recommended by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. We have seen the immediate impacts of this long-overdue change. WIC families not only have access to more fruits and vegetables, but a wider variety, positively impacting growers, retailers, and the nutritional needs of the families served. Data from the National WIC Association indicates that WIC toddlers are consuming more fruits and vegetables, setting the stage for healthier eating patterns and improved health outcomes in the long-term.

Congress cannot back down from this important step in building nutrition security and securing healthier outcomes for the next generation. We urge Congress to maintain its bipartisan commitment to WIC, inclusive of the recent adjustments in WIC's fruit and vegetable benefit.

The above statement is attributable to the American Public Health Association, International Fresh Produce Association, National Grocers Association, and National WIC Association.

“Plain and simple, the WIC fruit and vegetable benefit is a success story. Though nine out of ten Americans don’t meet federal dietary recommendations, and nearly one half of young children do not eat a daily vegetable, children participating in WIC consume *two cups* of fruits and vegetables per day. We cannot turn our backs on this progress and the children who rely on this important benefit, which infuses needed resources that improve access to healthy fruits and vegetables throughout every community in this country,” **said Cathy Burns, President & CEO of the International Fresh Produce Association (IFPA).**

“USDA’s WIC program is critical in addressing nutrition insecurity and food access for millions across the country, especially for those living in urban, rural, and underserved areas,” **said Stephanie Johnson, vice president of government relations for the National Grocers Association (NGA).** “The increased fruit and vegetable benefit has made implementing the program easier for our members. It has also improved the shopping experience for participants and increased the purchases of fruit and vegetables at a critical time for these families.”

“Programs like WIC have a proven record of increasing nutrition security for vulnerable women, children and families. Access to healthy food is a key social determinant of health with a direct impact on the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. APHA supports adequate and sustained funding for the WIC program. Increasing access to healthy food means healthier families, communities and a healthier nation,” **said Georges C. Benjamin, MD, Executive Director of the American Public Health Association (APHA).**

“The fruit and vegetable benefit is a game-changer, empowering millions of WIC-enrolled mothers and children to make the most nutritious choices for their families. By enabling participants to purchase produce, this benefit not only enhances their health and well-being but also establishes a foundation for lifelong healthy habits,” **said Dr. Jamila Taylor, President & CEO of the National WIC Association (NWA).** “Investing in the Cash Value Benefit ensures that WIC participants can access the vital nutrients found in fruits and vegetables, fostering healthier pregnancies, optimal growth and development in children, and reducing the risk of chronic diseases. It is imperative that Congress maintain the enhanced fruit and vegetable benefits while sustaining full funding for WIC services, as this targeted investment in nutrition security is a key driver of positive change, enabling a brighter future for the vulnerable populations relying on WIC.”