



Kathy Gallagher, Director

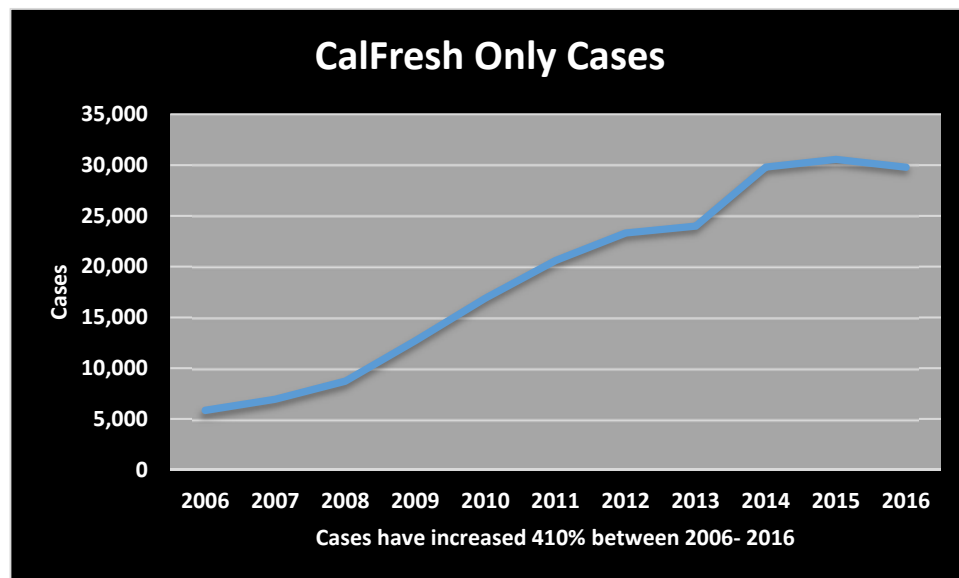
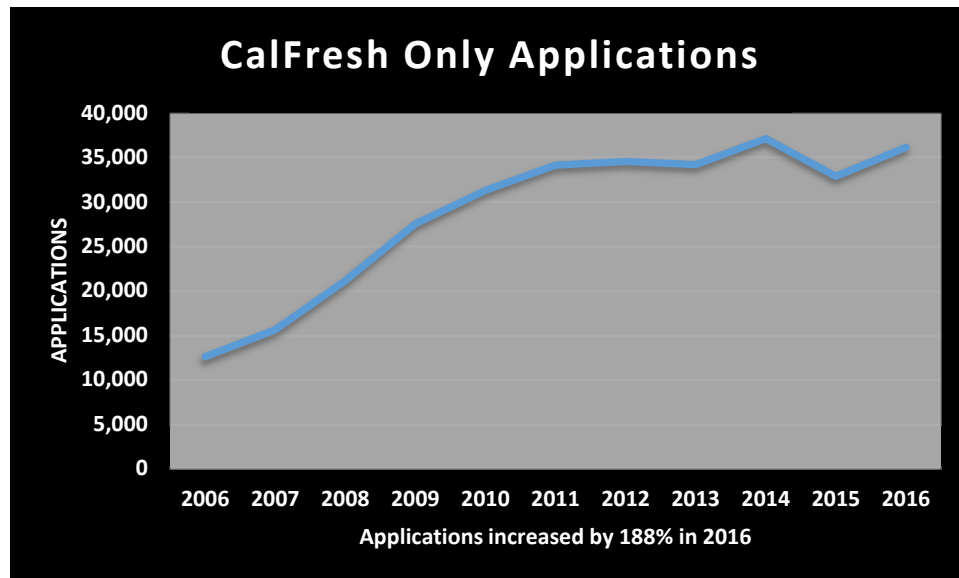
40 Douglas Drive, Martinez, CA 94553 • (925) 608 5000 • Fax (925) 313-1575 • www.ehsd.org

Date: August 28, 2017

Subject: **CALFRESH PROGRAM UPDATE**

The CalFresh program, formerly known as Food Stamps and federally known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) was designed to help provide assistance to hungry people, regardless of their age, gender, marital or family status. The program issues monthly electronic benefits that can be used to buy most foods at many markets and food stores.

Since the Great Recession, we have experienced an unprecedented increase in the number of individuals applying for CalFresh benefits. In 2006, we had approximately 12,554 families applying for aid as compared to 36,120 in 2016. This represents a 188% increase in the number of CalFresh applications received during this period.



Over the last 11 years, the CalFresh only cases have increased a total of 410% going from roughly 5,846 average cases a month in 2006 to 29,789 average monthly cases in 2016.

Beyond the CalFresh only average caseload of 29,789 in 2016, we also had an additional average of 4,250 Public Assistance cases, which represents those households that receive both cash aid (CalWORKs) and CalFresh. This represents a total average of 34,039 CalFresh cases in 2016.

In Contra Costa County, CalFresh puts almost \$10 million into the local economy each month. As indicated by the USDA, research shows that every \$1 provided in CalFresh benefits generates \$1.79 in economic activity. Using the multiplier effect, CalFresh pumped more than \$17.9 million into the local economy in the past year. This economic stimulus is almost exclusively Federal and State funded and provides an important local boost to our economy. CalFresh benefits help families stretch their food dollars to buy more healthy foods for the whole family.

The average, total monthly CalFresh benefits issued in 2006 was \$3,285,940 compared to the 2016 issuance of \$9,730,340. This accounts for an increase of 296% for our households and the local economy.

II. Eligibility for CalFresh

Households that include single individuals, couples, or families are eligible for CalFresh benefits if they meet certain income criteria and legally reside in California. For some CalFresh beneficiaries (under the 200% FPL) eligibility is not asset-based or resource-based which means their property is not counted such as vehicles, cash on hand or money contained in bank accounts.

The amount of benefits a person receives depends on the number of people in the household who purchase and prepare food together and how much monthly income is left after certain expenses are deducted. Income consists of earned and unearned income. Expenses like rent, utilities, dependent care and certain medical expenses are allowable deductions. For example, a household of one (1) with no income would be eligible to receive \$194.00 a month in CalFresh benefits and a household of 10 with no income would receive \$1,461.00 a month.

III. Program Accessibility

To make CalFresh benefits more readily accessible to County residents and families, over the last several years the Department has increased its efforts in working with the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano County as well as other community agencies dedicated to the CalFresh-eligible population.

As listed below, these efforts have contributed to the success of our expanding benefits to those in need of food security.

- The application process has been made easier by eliminating the requirement to apply through a face-to-face interview process. A telephone interview is now acceptable at both intake and recertification. A customer may still request a face-to-face interview if they are more comfortable meeting directly with an Eligibility Worker.
- Use of telephonic signature has begun at Department locations that have Automated Call Distribution capability such as the Medi-Cal CalFresh Service Center (MCSC) and the Health Care Access Center (HCAC). As we obtain and expand the necessary technology the use of telephonic signature will be used department-wide.
- Applicants can now apply for CalFresh benefits on-line through My Benefits CalWIN.org portal. Many of our community-based partners have received orientations/trainings on assisting individuals through this on-line application process. In addition, Community Based Organizations (CBOs) can register their organizations as vendors in CalWIN. This will allow the CBOs to track the number of applications they register and the number processed each month by the Department.

- A customer can also access benefits through the use of a multi-program single paper application. For example, a customer who applies for and is found ineligible for CalWORKs benefits can use this same application (the SAWS 2 Plus) to automatically apply for CalFresh benefits without completing another application.
- In February 2014, the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) initiated the Express Lane Eligibility waiver program in which certain CalFresh beneficiaries were given Medi-Cal benefits without having to complete and file an application. The waiver ended June 30, 2017.
- The statewide Work Incentive Nutritional Supplement (WINS) Program was implemented in Contra Costa County on July 1, 2014. Under the WINS program, CalFresh households who are not in receipt of CalWORKs, but who meet the work participation hours of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program and have a child in the household under 18 receive an additional \$10.00 food benefit each month. From April 2016 through March 2017 there is a monthly average of 2,936 households in receipt of this additional benefit.
- Horizontal Integration allows applicants who are applying for health coverage through the California Healthcare Eligibility Enrollment and Retention System, (CalHEERS) portal to complete their application for CalFresh and/or CalWORKs benefits at the same time without having to respond to questions already asked through the Covered California process.

It was expected that through Horizontal Integration there would be an increase in program participation rates by expediting program enrollment and minimizing client efforts. Tracking of these applications began in September 2016 and to date the average number of applications submitted each month are 36 CalFresh and 10 CalWORKs.

- Conversations are also taking place with the Health Services Department to expand the existing clinic consortium Medi-Cal Express application processing to include CalFresh.
- Other efforts to increase CalFresh enrollments are outlined in the Outreach section of this report.

IV. Current CalFresh Service Levels and Program Performance

A. Service Levels:

During Program Year 2015- 2016 the monthly average of individuals (families and single) who were in receipt of CalFresh benefits was 70,786. This is a 4% decrease from the previous program year which is the result of an improving economy. Forty-nine and a half percent (49.5%) of these individuals are children under the age of 18.

B. Program Performance:

1. Timeliness Processing Standards

FNS requires states and counties to maintain certain performance measures for the timely processing of CalFresh applications. These measures require that 90% of all applications received be processed within 30 days and requires a three (3) day processing period for those CalFresh applicants determined to require Expedited Services (ES).

We continue to meet the 30-day CalFresh application processing standard of 90% for PY 2015-16 with 95.9% of applications being processed within the 30-day processing requirement. During this same period we achieved a 98.86% processing of ES applications within three (3) days. With our existing efforts and commitment to the ES process, we appear to be on target for meeting the ES compliance rate of 90% for a third consecutive year.

While applications are being processed in a timely manner, the Department is looking into the details and reasons of denied applications. This review will assist in identifying training needs, increase participation and approval rating, and improve the Case and Procedural Error Rates. The top denial reasons are failure to keep a scheduled intake interview, failure to provide verifications, over income limits, not a separate household, SSI/SSP recipient, ineligible student, and application withdrawn.

2. Management Evaluation (ME)

As mandated by the FNS, the California State Department of Social Services (CDSS) is required to conduct a Management Evaluation (ME) review of Contra Costa County's administration of the CalFresh Program. The federal priority areas of the ME for FFY 2016 were Program Access, Customer Service, Timeliness of Application Processing, Payment Accuracy, Quality Control and Training. The ME review was conducted the week of October 24, 2016.

CDSS shared that it was unprecedented for a county of our size to have such few findings. When comparing this year to our 2013 and 2014 ME findings they were very pleased with the work completed as it showed the dedication of our staff and Department.

Two findings in the areas of Case Reviews and Program Access have both been corrected by including the fax number for filing applications being added to lobby posters and training has been completed that emphasizes the importance of adequate and timely noticing requirements.

CDSS was also impressed with the use of technology within our department such as: Self-scanning Kiosks, telephonic signature, ability to retrieve MCSC calls for Quality Management, MCSC customer surveys, ability to apply in lobby utilizing MyBenefitsCalWIN, electronic lobby signage, and the automation of the Rights and Reporting Responsibilities form. This illustrated how the use of technology can

improve the application process for our clients which is a critical component of the ME.

The next ME review will take place the week of October 9, 2017.

3. CalFresh Error Rate

Every month for every county FNS selects a random sampling of CalFresh cases that are to be reviewed for case errors involving miscalculations of income or household composition which result in benefit issuance errors. Our Quality Control (QC) Unit reviews those cases that are selected and determines our CalFresh error rate. Based on the number of cases reviewed and the number of errors cited an error rate percentage is then derived.

FNS is currently evaluating all States QC procedures to ensure that there is no bias applied to the final outcome of the error rate. As a result there will be no fiscal penalties tied to the error rate for FFY 2015 and FFY 2016. Therefore there will be no final error rate for FFY 2016. It resets with FFY 2017 with new QC rules and procedures for case reviews.

The error rate for the beginning of FFY 2017 (October through February 2017) is at 6.36% compared to the State error rate of 4.68%. As the county error rate is higher than the State, our County is at risk of being placed on a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) as not currently meeting performance standards which could result in a fiscal sanction. Staff and consultants are currently reviewing existing business practices as well as internal case review processes for reducing the current error rate and mitigating future errors.

In recent prior years, our County has been one of the counties with a consistently low error rate, which has contributed to the State error rate being below the federal threshold.

4. Outside Consultants

In our attempt to improve customer service and performance levels, we have hired outside consultants to assess our current business practices. While we have incorporated several improvement recommendations there are still other recommendations we will be instituting that will improve program access and customer service. In addition, a Quality Control (QC) consultant has been hired to review existing practices to improve the Departments' Payment Accuracy and Case and Procedural Error Rate.

- The QC consultant has worked with our IT staff in developing a Case Review Management System tool. This tool allows the reviewer to go on-line to complete the case review as well as produce real time data reports. This has been instrumental in allowing our Unit Supervisors and the Program Integrity Unit to quickly identify error trends so that corrective action can be taken. In addition, the consultant has assisted our ability to fine tune the QC and Quality Assurance (QA) process with focus placed on the root cause of

errors. This has allowed us to identify error trends and develop corrective action strategies.

- The Business Process consultant has evaluated our current CalFresh business processes and analyzed data to identify areas for improvement. It was determined that missed appointments are a large barrier for many applicants. EHSD has incorporated and is evaluating options to reduce missed appointments, including providing same day appointments, text appointment reminders, and expanding alternatives to face-to-face interviews such as phone and video conferencing.
- EHSD is also working to identify and reduce “churn,” which is when clients cycle on and off the program in a short amount of time; specifically, applicants who reapply within three months of their semi-annual report or recertification being due. If those clients were able to maintain continuous enrollment, it would greatly reduce the workload of EHSD staff without an interruption in service for clients. EHSD has begun work in this area, with a first step being the implementation of text reminders to clients when their reports are due. In addition, a “packet wrapper” was created for individuals walking into the district office. This four step guide provides an overview of the enrollment process including the interview, verification request, and EBT card issuance. Another tool was developed for on-line applicants that places emphasis on how to download and upload documents digitally, and how to create a MyBenefitsCalWIN account so the applicant can track the application status.

5. Staffing

The Department is continually evaluating its staffing needs and hiring new staff is an ongoing priority although the ability to readily fill new and approved vacant positions continues to be a systemic problem within the Department in terms of having readily available candidates from which to interview and hire.

Compounding the staffing issues was the request for the Department to reduce positions in January 2017. In this process, the Workforce Services Bureau lost 81 operational, front-line positions. The loss of intake workers, eligibility trainees and ongoing caseload worker positions in the Workforce Services Bureau will compromise the improvements that have been achieved in the CalFresh program, specifically the reduced error rate and Expedited Services delivery.

Requests have been made of EHSD to work toward same day appointments/one day processing in the CalFresh application process. We are committed to shortening the application process where possible, but again staffing is a barrier in providing same day services. In order to implement this process, we project a minimum of 30 additional CalFresh staff would be required. Based on an average current monthly application number of 2,600, our current staff can process approximately 36 CalFresh applications a month per worker.

V. Outreach and Community Partnership

EHSD is proud of our efforts to increase CalFresh participation thereby ensuring that more children, families and individuals are able to put nutritious food on their tables each day. The Department has convened a CalFresh Partner Group with the goal of increasing enrollment in the County. The partners include the Food Bank of Contra Costa County and Solano, Crisis Center, the Multi-Faith ACTION Coalition, Ensuring Opportunity, First 5, and Meals on Wheels. This group's strategies are to increase CalFresh enrollment and reach populations with historically lower enrollment. What is already clearly a success is forging a path to partner with community organizations on a shared goal; the ability to evaluate and modify processes and procedures; and a mindset that working together is always better.

The partner group is developing strategies for 2017 & 2018 that focus on outreach for children, seniors, Latinos, reducing churn, and looking at dual enrollment by evaluating existing Medi-Cal customers who could be potentially eligible to CalFresh.

Successful efforts and key achievements of the group are illustrated as follows:

- CalFresh Enrollment Process Improvements: We are developing new and strengthening existing business processes for helping people enroll in CalFresh. EHSD currently works with the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano to train nonprofit staff in CalFresh so they have a better understanding of the program and enrollment process. This enhanced training and knowledge as well as a more specifically identified EHSD liaison for the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano will not only enhance the quality of training and knowledge in the community, but will strengthen our community partnerships.
- Our partnering agencies have expressed a desire for the County to participate more robustly in outreach efforts. Community activities, grants and funding opportunities often request community based organizations to partner with the County or the County needs to participate as a stakeholder. With the staffing issues that are currently being faced, it is challenging our staff to participate in expanded outreach efforts.

We are currently exploring the possibility of providing additional funding support to our partners to expand their outreach efforts. We will then measure the impact for the timely processing of applications.

- The partnership between the Multi-Faith ACTION Coalition, EHSD and the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano is working to cultivate community volunteers who can help people with the CalFresh enrollment process. The Multi-Faith ACTION Coalition has a roster of 60 volunteers who received CalFresh training from the Food Bank. They are now ready to be deployed to nonprofit agencies, places of worship, food distribution sites and shelters to encourage and assist people to sign up for CalFresh benefits.
- The John Muir/Mt. Diablo Community Health Fund awarded a grant to the Food Bank for CalFresh Outreach. Partnering with EHSD, the Food Bank mailed postcards to households currently receiving Medi-Cal but not CalFresh. The Food Bank also

partnered with local school districts to mail to families with children on free/reduced lunch. Funds were also used to print posters advertising the CalFresh program that are posted in health clinics, food pantries, and other locations where low-income families are likely to visit. In an effort to reduce churn the mailings have extended into reminders for active CalFresh recipients who have a recertification or Semi Annual Report (SAR 7) due in the month of May and June. This is a two month pilot focusing on the population in the Richmond area as this is the highest percent of discontinuance.

- We are working with the Pittsburg Unified School District (PUSD) to implement AB 402, which would allow information sharing between EHSD and the District so we can reach out to students' families receiving free / reduced lunch and encourage them to apply for CalFresh. Families who opt-in are sent applications to apply for CalFresh, shortening the application process by allowing families to apply without coming in to the office. PUSD has been working with EHSD and the Food Bank by adding a question to their school meal application in order to easily identify families that desire to also apply for CalFresh. The families' information is then sent to EHSD to begin the CalFresh application process. We anticipate working with other school districts within the county in the same manner.

EHSD sent out 484 CalFresh application packets to those families who indicated an interest in the CalFresh program. Due to the low response rate, a reminder flyer was mailed to the same households three weeks following the initial mailing. The Food Bank made available a link to the GetCalFresh on-line applications as well as contacting them for application assistance. A total of sixty-one (61) applications have been received by EHSD through this project. Twelve (12) were received directly into the EHSD office and forty-nine (49) were submitted using the on-line "GetCalFresh" portal. Of these applications 57% were approved, 5% withdrew application, 34% were denied and two applications were unable to be located. . The denial reasons include failure to provide requested verifications, failure to keep intake interview appointments, no eligible household members, and excess income.

- EHSD, Multi-Faith ACTION volunteers, and Ensuring Opportunity conducted an outreach campaign with local mayors to raise awareness of the CalFresh program and to highlight the program's economic benefit. Local Mayors were issued CalFresh Awareness Proclamations, posted links to the CalFresh application on their city websites, and advertise the health benefits of the CalFresh program. To engage the Mayors, the CalFresh Partner Group members highlighted the economic benefit the program brings to the local economy.
- As staffing levels allow we will plan a series of "CalFresh Express" events that provide an opportunity to process applications and issue same day benefits while in the community. To date there have been two one day enrollment events: one in San Pablo and one in Bay Point.

The first CalFresh Express took place on June 26, 2015 at the Davis Park Community Center in San Pablo. The event was a true collaboration with the Food Bank and other community organizations. The date was selected as this was the same day the Food Bank's Community Produce Program truck was at this location. The community was provided fresh fruits and vegetables to families while they waited. The UC Cooperative

Extension gave out tastings from this produce and promoted healthy eating through various games and activities. Volunteers from the MultiFaith ACTION Coalition reviewed the program's rights and responsibilities with applicants with oversight from EHSD personnel. West Contra Costa Unified School District passed out lunches to children playing in the park. Overall, 74 new applications were taken and 48 (65%) families were approved for benefits.

The second event was held on April 29, 2016 at the Ambrose Community Center in Bay Point. While the number of applications taken was not as great as anticipated, all staff continued with the goal of same day approval and access to CalFresh Benefits. During the event 35 new applications were taken, 23 (66%) were approved, and 18 new EBT cards were generated. All partners taking in lessons learned as it appears that there was less marketing for this event. This location was selected for an event on October 2016, but did not occur due to union work action.

- Technology partnership

- EHSD is working with the Food Bank and Code for America to utilize a mobile application equipped with electronic signature. This will allow the streamlining of preliminary applications through an electronic portal via assistants in our partnering agencies. The Food Bank and EHSD piloted a new application GetCalFresh (formerly known as CLEAN), which is a simplified version of the on-line CalFresh application that can be used on a tablet, smartphone or laptop. It was designed by Code for America for use by community-based organizations. The application takes only about 5-10 minutes to complete and is much simpler for outreach workers in the field. Clients' documents can also be uploaded for submission with the application. The Food Bank continues to use GetCalFresh and is looking to this platform as their sole application portal. It has greatly streamlined the application process and makes filling out an online application while in line at a food distribution event more feasible. This will increase the number of CalFresh applications.

- Read Only Access

To further support Food Bank efforts to assist clients more directly, EHSD has provided CalWIN read only access to the Food Bank. This will allow designated Food Bank staff to look up clients' case status in real time, remind clients of their appointments, let them know what paperwork they are missing, etc. This should improve timely processing while also saving EHSD staff time. Currently the Food Bank has to contact EHSD staff to get case updates, so this will significantly streamline access to data. The contract has been executed and we expect to implement this month.

- Marketing

- Volunteers from the Leadership Contra Costa alumni group have expressed interest in helping advertise and market CalFresh to communities with many eligible people. Developing a marketing plan for CalFresh will require studying

the issue and applying smart advertising techniques to the challenge of CalFresh enrollment. Leadership Contra Costa has marketing professionals who can help with this work.

- o The month of May has been designated “CalFresh Awareness Month” by several other California counties. Working with our community partners, the County Board of Supervisors provided an official resolution and declared May as CalFresh Awareness month in Contra Costa County.
- o Community Produce Program is another successful example of the collaboration between EHSD and the Food Bank. The Food Bank brings a food truck to the EHSD Antioch District office parking lot at 4545 Delta Fair, every first and third Friday of the month from 11:00 a.m. to noon. Sixty-eight (68) households received produce during the initial food truck visit. The Food Bank and EHSD have been working together to find other locations allowing the population to receive fresh produce.
- Community Training on CalFresh:
 - o The EHSD CalFresh Program Analyst conducts “Just the Basics” training with the Food Bank which takes place three to four times per year with 25 to 30 participants from community organizations in each session. Provided in the training is a CalFresh overview, hands-on outreach application exercise as well as an introduction to the on-line application MyBenefitsCalWIN.
 - o This training has been a foundation in developing new partners since 2006. Aides of the Board of Supervisors, staff from Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) and regular attendees have attended this training from WIC, the Monument Crisis Center, La Clinica, Rubicon, Public Health, Head Start, One Stop Centers and the Family Justice Centers.
 - o EHSD also participates in the Food Nutrition Policy Consortium which is chaired by the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano. The group meets to discuss nutrition-related events and activities within the county including CalFresh outreach opportunities.
 - o Over the last five (5) years, EHSD has attended an annual Food Bank Summit which is held on a rotational basis between Contra Costa and Solano Counties. The purpose of the Summit is to educate, inform and update those in attendance on topics such as Nutrition Education, Food Safety, what the Food Bank does, and provide instruction and mandates of USDA on the CalFresh Program. This is a daylong event and is attended by various County Department representatives, agencies, and CBOs who work closely with the Food Bank.
 - o Beginning this month EHSD staff, through rotational assignments, are providing client navigational services and more direct access to benefits including CalFresh at both the Richmond One Stop Center and the Richmond Family Justice Center. These type of rotational assignments are planned to be provided by the end of the year at the Concord Family Justice Center as well.

o Advocacy

As the CalFresh Partner Group worked at expanding access to increase participation; it was clear that changes at the local, State, and National level would be helpful, or even sometimes necessary, to improve CalFresh benefit access. Current CalFresh policies limit accessibility, including an application process that can be arduous for residents with young children, those who work traditional hours, those who are disabled, and the elderly. Policy changes that allow residents to apply over the phone, through the mail, or on-line are recent additions, but work is still needed to make CalFresh as accessible as possible.

The CalFresh Partner Group is looking to CalFresh advocacy to increase participation. Several partner organizations have legislative platforms that include CalFresh concerns, including addressing college student food insecurity, providing supplemental benefits in the summer to families with school-age children, and simplifying the application process by using electronic employment databases to verify income.

o Participation Rate

As illustrated above the CalFresh Partner Group is committed to increasing participation. A county level measure that assesses the extent to which the eligible population is served is important. One way of monitoring the participation rate is the use of the California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA) report on the Program Access Index (PAI). The PAI estimates CalFresh utilization among low-income individuals in each of California's 58 counties. While on its own, the PAI is not a comprehensive tool for evaluating level of participation, it does provide a snapshot into the number of individuals receiving CalFresh benefits. The most recent PAI ranks Contra Costa County at 42 of the 58 counties. The CalFresh partners group continues to evaluate other methods of assessing the participation rate.

VI. Restaurant Meals Program (RMP)

Federal regulations allowed counties to implement a Restaurant Meals Program (RMP) that would enable eligible homeless, disabled and/or elderly (ages 60 and above) CalFresh households to use CalFresh benefits to purchase hot, prepared meals at participating restaurants. State regulations have been in place since May 1, 2004 allowing an interested county to submit a proposal to CDSS requesting approval to implement the RMP.

There are a great deal of requirements and mandates necessary to implement a successful RMP. The key component of an RMP proposal is the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to be used with participating restaurants detailing obligations of both the county and the restaurant.

In the last two years there has been only one additional county participating in the RMP due to the need for dedicated staff necessary to implement. Contra Costa County is one of the 86% of California counties not participating in the RMP.

Only 14% of counties in the State currently participate in the program and based on our outreach and information received from other counties, the primary reasons for non-participation include lack of restaurant/vendor interest in the program, and the time and resources necessary for county staff to administer the program. Contra Costa County is also geographically wide spread and does not have a concentrated area of homeless population. Of those counties who administer the RMP there is a heavy concentration of restaurants to match the heavily populated areas of customers who can utilize the program.

The challenges of administering the program as stated by these counties are the requirement for dedicated staff to implement the RMP and to continually resolve and troubleshoot issues received from customers and participating restaurants. Proactive and immediate action is necessary in operating the RMP and there is a substantial reliance/dependence on County staff.

Besides ongoing monitoring activities, County staff is called upon to assist restaurants in completing the necessary paperwork to participate in the program, and to troubleshoot technical problems such as difficulties with the Point of Sale equipment or a customer's card that does not work or contain benefits. Counties also experience difficulties in getting vendors to participate in the program or those restaurants who want to participate are rejected by FNS.

Given what we have learned on the RMP especially in terms of required County staff resources, this program has been considered but not implemented in Contra Costa County.

VII. Legislation

Under the current Administration, we continue to be concerned about potential legislative or allocation methodology changes, which may result in client eligibility and/or funding reductions to SNAP. We continue to track this issue through several mechanisms including County representative organizations and our Policy and Planning Division.

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) limits the receipt of CalFresh benefits to three months in a 36-month period for the Able Bodied without Dependents (ABAWD) CalFresh population if they are not working; participating at least 80 hours per month in a qualifying education or training activity; participating in a workfare program or exempt due to age; caring for a child or incapacitated household member; or certified medically as unfit for employment.

Previously, there was a waiver to this requirement, which is scheduled to end August 31, 2018. When this occurs, ABAWDs will be required to participate in work activities in order to continue to receive benefits.

With the impending end of this waiver, the State and Counties are current working on various concepts to serve this population effective September 1, 2018. This is a current emphasis of the Department at this time.

VIII. Policy Items of Interest

The following changes will have an impact to our CalFresh participation, and/or increase the workload of our staff.

- Telephonic signature

The telephonic signature is a type of electronic signature that uses an individual's recorded spoken signature or verbal consent in place of an actual written signature. The use of the telephonic signature, as part of the application or recertification process, will eliminate the need to mail documents in order to gather a client's ink signature. In addition, utilizing this process will also reduce the amount of cases being discontinued for failure to complete the recertification process, which will assist with reducing churn. EHSD does not yet have the technology in place to roll out telephone signature Department wide but it is used at our locations that operate under Automated Call Distribution such as the Health Care Access Center and the Medi-Cal CalFresh Service Center. We began using this process in May 2016.

- SNAP to Skills or Employment and Training

Contra Costa County is currently participating in SNAP to Skills led by Seattle Jobs Initiative (SJI). The Federal and State CalFresh agencies have contracted with SJI to help select California counties develop Employment and Training (E&T) programs. Contra Costa is one of 34 counties in the State to offer CalFresh participants training and assistance towards job readiness, job security, work norms and access to higher education. We are partnering with Opportunity Junction and Rubicon Programs, who are overseen by the Foundation for California Community Colleges' Fresh Success program.

The E&T program launched in Contra Costa on April 17, 2017. To date, there are 58 participants in the E&T program.

- Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Suspense Status

Due to the outcome of the Hector Riojas vs. USDA case, individuals in California who are in SSI suspense status are no longer *ineligible* for CalFresh benefits. It was argued that SSI recipients whose benefits are in suspense status should be eligible for CalFresh. Effective August 30, 2016, individuals in California who are in SSI suspense status are not precluded from CalFresh eligibility. These individuals must apply and meet normal CalFresh eligibility requirements in order to receive benefits. While this change does increase the number of eligible household members, the benefits are reduced as the SSI income that was previously excluded is now included in the budget.

- Public Charge

Immigration discussions at the national level continue to cause concern for the CalFresh recipient and potential applicant. There have been no regulatory changes to date and we continue to communicate to the community that it is business as usual. Use of CalFresh

benefits does not affect one's immigration status and will not cause immigration officials to consider these individuals as a public charge.

Public charge is a term used by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS) when referring to noncitizens that have or may become dependent on public cash assistance such as CalWORKs, General Assistance, or Supplemental Security Income (SSI). This determination is made by CIS when a person is adjusting their citizenship status to lawful permanent resident. CalFresh is considered a supplemental nutrition program and not a cash benefit. As a result CalFresh recipients are not a public charge.

- Elderly and / or Disabled Household Demonstration Projects

Standard Medical Deduction

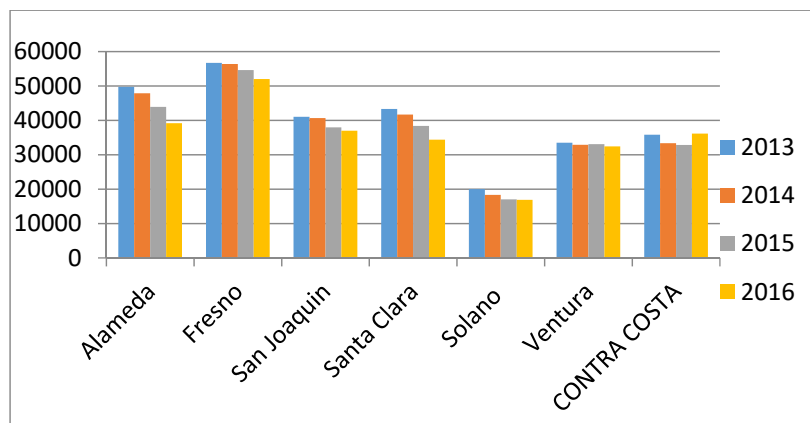
Effective October 1, 2017 through September 30, 2021 a standard medical deduction of \$120 will be issued for households in which an elderly or disabled member incurs medical expenses in excess of \$35 per month. Households with an elderly or disabled member include those with at least one individual who is 60 years of age or older and or disabled and or receives a disability based benefit. To be eligible the household must verify that they incur more than \$35 a month in qualifying medical expenses. Households with more than \$155 a month may opt out to document and claim actual expenses.

Elderly Simplified Application

Effective October 1, 2017 through September 30, 2021 a simplified application process has been approved in an attempt at improving CalFresh access among the state's low income elderly and disabled population. The project waives the recertification interview requirement, uses existing data matches to reduce verification requests, and extends the certification period to 36 months. The project applies to households where all members are either elderly (age 60 or older) and / or disabled with no earned income. The project does not apply to other CalFresh participants.

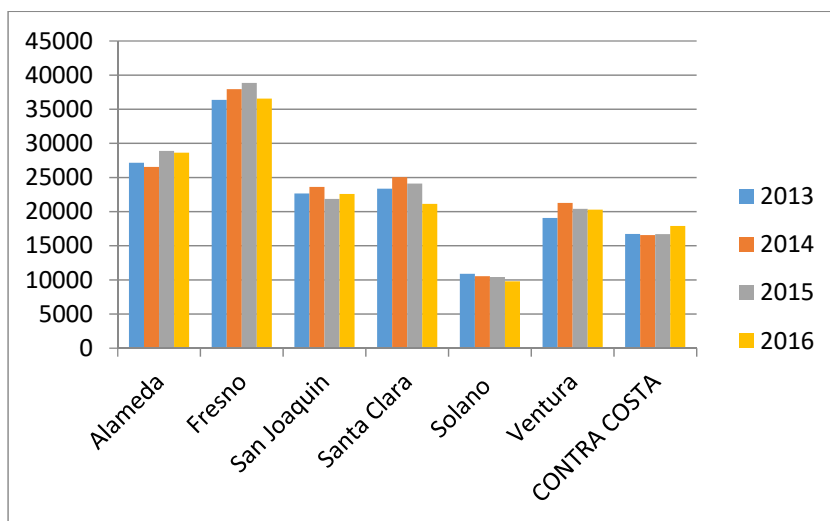
IX. County Comparisons: CalFresh Applications and Caseloads from 2013 through 2016.

- Applications Received

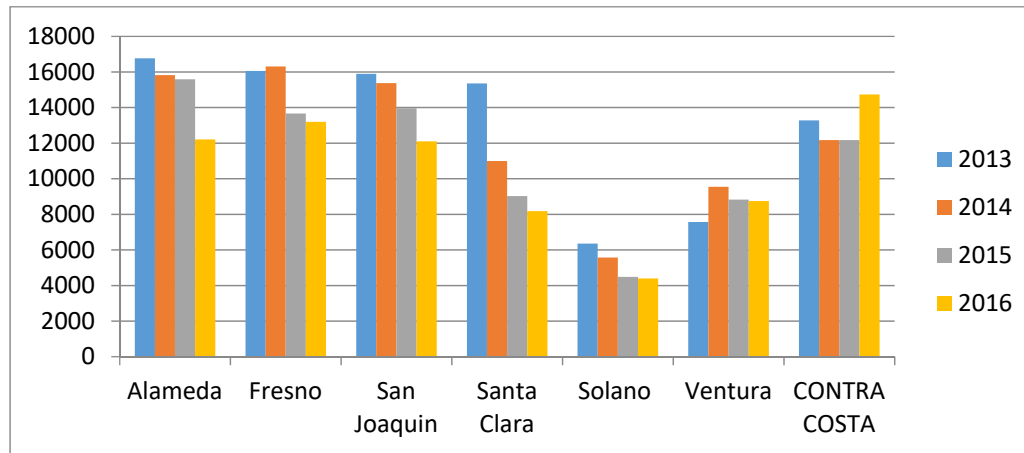


Increased outreach events held by the Food Bank has assisted with increasing the number of new applications.

- **Applications Approved**



- **Applications Denied**



Contributing factors in this comparison are:

1. Increased applications result in higher dispositions including denials.
2. San Joaquin County began a pilot where they contacted applicants who failed to keep intake appointments in an attempt to complete the intake interview. If successful contact was made an intake interview took place, which resulted in lower denials.
3. Alameda County under state monitoring and resulted in lower denials.
4. Many counties have more than one Program Analyst dedicated to CalFresh.

Alameda ~ 2.5 CF Program Analysts with one designated for outreach

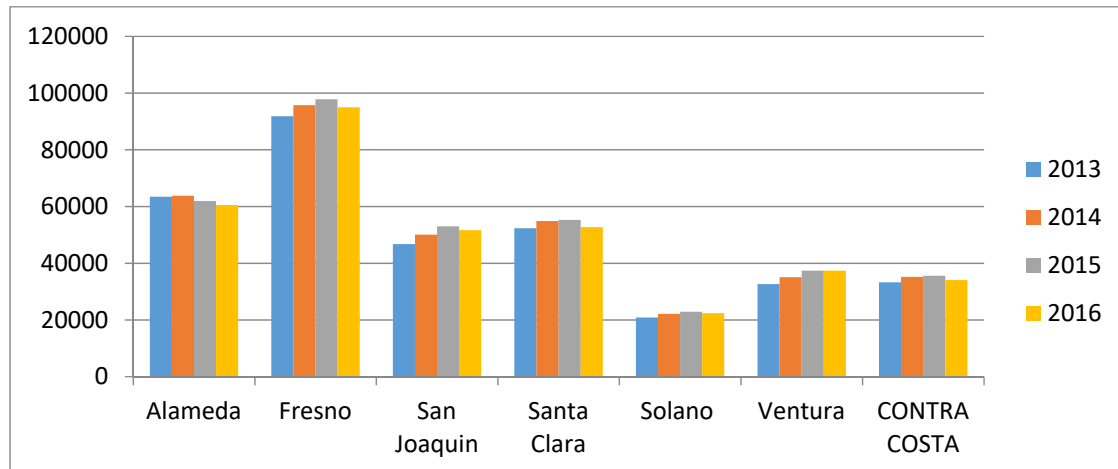
Fresno ~ 2 CF Program Analysts

Ventura ~ 2 CF Program Analysts until 7/3/17. As of July 3, 2017, there are four (4) CF Program Analysts. Two (2) are dedicated to writing policy and two (2) operational analysts who visit district offices to ensure regulations are being followed and provide Q and A.

There is an additional analyst dedicated to outreach for all programs. San Joaquin, Solano and Contra Costa have one program analyst.

5. Due to Contra Costa's high denial rate corrective action strategies are being developed. This includes ongoing Case and Procedural Error Rate (CAPER) training, CF Topic of the Month, Monthly Bulletins, and Hot Tips on top error trends.

- **Active Cases**



X. Important Next Steps

The Department remains committed to providing timely and ready access to CalFresh benefits for those with food insecurity, and in continuing to serve our CalFresh customers in a timely and accurate manner. To this end, we have a continual improvement objective in the areas of outreach, access, enrollment, and services delivery.

Part of this objective is to continue our community outreach efforts and to work even more closely with our community partners to expand access to CalFresh benefits. Expanding access includes our continued rollout of electronic and other alternative means for applying for benefits. We will also continue our efforts to further streamline our CalFresh application and benefits renewal process, and will continue to work on increasing knowledge and awareness of the CalFresh program throughout and to targeted areas within the County.