

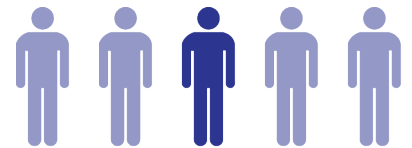
EQUITABLE ACCESS

to Healthy & Local Food IN MARIN COUNTY

Prepared by the Marin Food Policy Council • November 2016

Marin County consistently ranks as the healthiest county in California, yet not all residents have the same opportunity to live long and healthy lives. Inequities due to racial segregation and income inequality have translated into poor health for some. In other words, it matters where you live in Marin.¹ There is a 16 year difference in life expectancy between residents living in Ross than those living in Marin City, with heart disease being the leading cause of death.²

Many residents experience hunger, food insecurity, poor nutrition, and persistent health problems from diet-related diseases. In fact, one in five Marin residents is at risk of food insecurity. We know that “healthy eating is the most powerful tool we have to prevent the onset of disease,” but communities without access to healthy food simply do not have the resources needed to live a healthy and disease-free life.³



In Marin County, **1 in 5** residents is at risk of **food insecurity**.

Marin County's highest rates of obesity, sugar sweetened beverage consumption, diabetes, and other chronic diseases are found in our communities of color, which also are the communities that lack access to healthy, affordable food and have an abundance of unhealthy food and beverage options.

In an effort to address the huge disparities in access to healthy food, the Marin Food Policy Council, a broad-based coalition of county agencies, community leaders, nonprofit organizations, institutions, and interested residents, released a preliminary report titled “Equitable Access to Healthy and Local Food in Marin County.” They joined the Board of Supervisors in declaring October 24 as ‘Food Day’ in Marin County through the adoption of a Food Day Resolution. The report outlined challenges and priority solutions needed to address equitable access to healthy and local food. As a result, the Board tasked the Council with identifying three to five practical, effective, and data-driven recommendations to focus immediate attention and resources.

This report serves as a follow-up to the initial report, and provides a deeper analysis of the challenges Marin County faces, as well as more detailed proposals for solutions. The report looks at three themes in order to increase equitable access to healthy and local food:

FOOD ACCESS: the ability to physically access healthy and local food close to home at retail outlets

FOOD ASSISTANCE: the financial resources to be able to purchase food

FOOD PRODUCTION: the promotion of community and urban gardening

While the executive summary on the next page highlights one priority recommendation from each thematic area, the full report includes several other important steps the county could take to address this challenge.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FOOD ACCESS:

The ability to physically access healthy and local food close to home at supermarkets, grocery stores, and other retail food outlets is critical to food security. Residents participating in CX3 (Communities of Excellence in Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity Prevention) found that only 11% of stores in the Canal neighborhood and 0% of stores in Marin City met “Neighborhood Food Store Quality” standards indicating whether local stores were safely accessible to neighborhood residents and offered healthy, affordable foods.

Based on these findings, a full-service grocery store in Marin City is key to addressing racial and health inequities. Recommendations to move this strategy forward are:

- Identify innovative neighborhood-based retail strategies, programs, and/or policies that are key to ensure the success of full-service, neighborhood-based grocery stores.
- Provide financial incentives for full-service grocery stores and other healthy retail food establishments.
- Streamline the review process and fast-tracking of permits for full-service grocery stores in high priority areas, especially Marin City.

FOOD ASSISTANCE:

CalFresh, known nationally as SNAP and commonly as ‘food stamps’, is our state’s first line of defense against hunger. Estimates suggest that only about half of eligible people are enrolled in Marin County,⁴ meaning many of the residents who are eligible for the program are not receiving benefits. Place-based outreach has proven to be successful in many areas of public health.

As an effort to reduce childhood health disparities, our recommendation is to strengthen the application pathway between the Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program and CalFresh. This can be achieved by implementing AB402 across all school districts in Marin so that a school meal application form can be used to initiate the application process for CalFresh.

Recommendations to move this strategy forward are:

- Conduct targeted in-reach at schools in school districts with high free and reduced price meal enrollment, such as San Rafael, in order to facilitate the smooth implementation of AB 402.
- Provide place-based outreach at targeted schools.
- Strive to achieve a 5% increase in enrollment among families at targeted schools by December 2017.

URBAN/COMMUNITY FOOD PRODUCTION:

While food access and assistance with healthy food is of vital importance, community food production and urban agriculture provides a longer-term, ecological, and educational solution to nutrition-based health problems. Up and down Marin’s 101 corridor, demand for community garden plots outpaces supply.⁵ Establishing new community gardens in Marin can be a lengthy, expensive, and politically complex endeavor. School gardens are widespread but operate with varying degrees of success — many lack adequate infrastructure, stable funding, and consistent, sufficient volunteer or paid support necessary to provide an ongoing supply of produce for students and school kitchens, and/or an impactful educational program for all students. Urban agriculture has been shown to raise home values, improve health, teach ecological stewardship, and build positive communities, raising the level of food security in low-income communities.⁶

Supporting school and community gardens, and other urban agriculture in Marin County as part of a longer-term solution to its food security is recommended. Funding is critically needed to move this strategy forward for the following:

- Two part-time staff members or one full-time staff member to provide consistent, reliable, and comprehensive support for community food production in the county for at least two years.
- Tools, soil, starts, seeds, building materials and other hard costs of school and community gardens, in addition to tool and seed libraries, particularly in low-income communities.

INTRODUCTION

THE MARIN FOOD POLICY COUNCIL

Marin Food Policy Council works to create a framework for action for Marin County on issues affecting food access, chronic nutritional shortfall, diet-related disease, and other forms of food insecurity. The council is dedicated to pursuing the goal of **Community Food Security** for all Marin residents.

Community Food Security is a condition in which all residents, at all times, have access to a culturally appropriate, nutritionally adequate diet from sustainable, non-emergency sources. Community Food Security addresses root causes of food insecurity and utilizes a systems-based approach to problem solving that optimizes both society's role and individual responsibility in creating conditions for health.

Established in 1994, the Marin Food Policy Council was the second food policy council to convene in the nation to address food and farming policy. The Council reconvened in 2012 under the direction of Janet Brown, a local farmer and owner of Allstar Organics, with the support and guidance of University of California Cooperative Extension, the Marin County Board of Supervisors, and the Marin Community Foundation. Today, the Council is a broad-based coalition of county agencies, community leaders, nonprofit organizations, institutions, and interested residents who meet in a roundtable format to exchange information, explore issues, learn together, and make recommendations regarding local food systems planning, policy, and practical solutions.

The Council has **20 individual members, representing 13 county agencies and community-based organizations**, and collaborates regularly with community partners to further its breadth across the county and depth of representation from underserved communities. Working together, the Marin Food Policy Council seeks to strengthen the partnerships necessary to devise practical, effective, and data-driven policy solutions to create the conditions necessary for Community Food Security and provide mutual support conducive to systems-based problem solving.



METHODS

In 2013, community partners identified equitable access to healthy and local food in Marin City, the Canal neighborhood in San Rafael, and West Marin as a top priority on which the Marin Food Policy Council should focus its efforts. Through 2014 and early 2015, the Council gathered information, heard expert testimony, convened three community food security tours, and engaged in focused discussion on the issue of equitable access. In October 2015, leveraging its shared understanding, the Council developed a preliminary report titled "Equitable Access to Healthy and Local Food in Marin County: Preliminary Report on Policy Priorities to the Board of Supervisors" and joined in a resolution with the Marin County Board of Supervisors declaring October 24, 2015, as 'Food Day' in Marin County.



Between October 2015 and April 2016, the Marin Food Policy Council, directed by the Marin County Board of Supervisors, worked closely with Health and Human Services, UC Cooperative Extension, the Community Development Agency, Marin City Community Services District, and the SF-Marin Food Bank to explore the feasibility of the policy strategies outlined in the Preliminary Report and prioritize solutions.

This resulting 2016 report further defines the challenges and opportunities related to accessing healthy and local food in Marin County and hones the most immediate priorities to expand access to healthy and local food for all Marin residents. The report maintains a systems-based approach of interlocking policies, programs, and practices needed to expand Community Food Security throughout Marin’s most vulnerable communities.

AUDIENCE

This is first and foremost an internal document for the Marin Food Policy Council and its member organizations. It will be used as a map toward policy changes to advocate for what will move the needle for better food equity in our county. It can also guide and unify Marin County’s government efforts towards a more equitable food system. Although used primarily by council members, it is a public document and as such will be used to explain to others the necessity behind the proposed policy changes.

INTENDED USE

The intended use of this report is to identify the complex interrelated problems regarding healthy food access in Marin County, to bring consensus amongst Marin Food Policy Council members, county government, and the public toward priority problems and solutions, and to develop a living document to guide decision making. The objective of this report is to provide a strategic plan for equitable access to healthy and local food across Marin County in order to align existing and new efforts under the common goal of equity.

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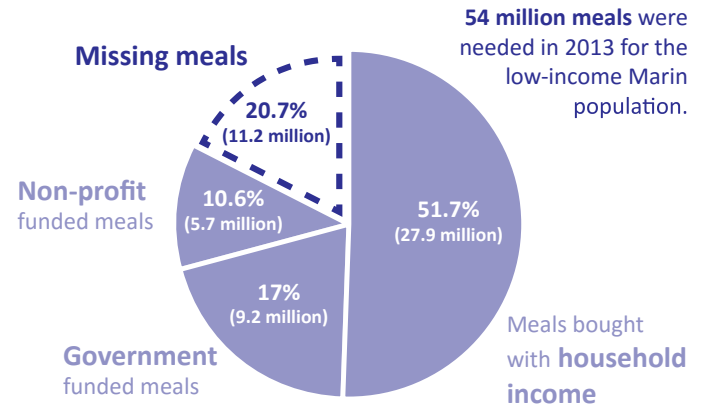
BACKGROUND

KEY ISSUES

Marin County spans 500 square miles with 80% agricultural and protected open space lands and 250,000 residents with five supervisorial districts, 11 cities or towns, and 16 unincorporated communities. Although Marin County consistently ranks as the healthiest county in California, it has one of the widest discrepancies in longevity from community to community. Many residents experience hunger, food insecurity, poor nutrition, and persistent health inequities from diet-related diseases. In fact, **one in five Marin residents is at risk of food insecurity.**

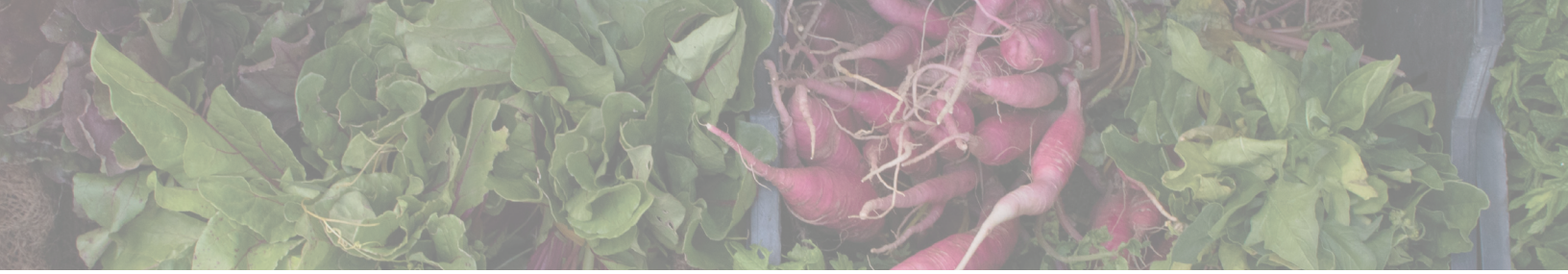
In 2014, 20.7% of the meals needed for the population living below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level — or 11.2 million meals — were ‘missing.’ In other words, they were not accounted for through household income, the nonprofit sector, or government programs like CalFresh. This means that residents are sacrificing quality, quantity, and consistency of meals in order to make ends meet.

Low-income households in Marin County were missing 11.2 million meals in 2014



From the 2016 'Missing meals in San Francisco and Marin' report by the SF-Marin Food Bank

	MARIN CITY	THE CANAL	WEST MARIN	MARIN COUNTY
Board of Supervisors	District 3 Kate Spears	District 4 Steve Kinsey	District 4 Steve Kinsey	5 Supervisorial Districts
Local government	Unincorporated	City of San Rafael	Unincorporated	
Population	3,200	10,800	12,000	250,000
% living in poverty (at or below 185% of the Federal Poverty Level)	57.7%	57.3%		17%
% overweight or obese	75.1%	36.6%	43.6%	44%
% eligible free/reduced- priced meal	84.4%	98.4%	60.9%	



LEVERAGING SUCCESSES

Marin County has many successful programs aimed at increasing access to healthy and local food as well as a wide range of committed partners working together to make great progress in this arena. Marin County Health and Human Services has modeled successful healthy retail efforts in the Canal, and the Marin City Community Services District and Marin City CX3 have mobilized significant community support around a full-service grocery store in Marin City. Additionally, a funders' meeting was held to garner financial support for a consultant to identify and recruit a grocery store suitable for the Gateway Shopping Center location. The recent news of Target moving into the shopping center offers many opportunities, however, the impact it will have on attracting a grocer to a food desert such as Marin City is unknown. Therefore, the need for an expert to move things forward is critical. Key partners (including Health and Human Services, the Marin City Community Services District, and the Community Development Agency) are engaged and continue to support efforts to increase access to healthy food in Marin City.

Marin County Health and Human Services (H&HS) and the SF-Marín Food Bank have worked to increase awareness and enrollment in CalFresh. Currently, H&HS is working with community partners on systematic changes to improve the quality of customer service for CalFresh eligible people living in Marin. Strategies for improvement include decreasing call center wait time, conducting targeted outreach activities and participating in place-based enrollment events such as CalFresh in a Day.

School and community gardens across Marin are growing in popularity with an increase in the number of school and community gardens from 89 community gardens in 2009 to over 115 today, and waitlists for garden plots indicate continued demand. Urban and suburban agriculture in Marin is a growing trend and has the potential to empower residents and expand community food security. Our preliminary work in these three arenas: Food Access, Food Assistance, and Community Food Production, has built the foundation for deeper, broader, and ultimately more impactful work across the county by identifying needs, piloting promising practices, and devising local, community-based solutions.

MARIN COUNTY'S COMMITMENT TO HEALTHY EATING

Marin County's commitment to Healthy Eating and Active Living (HEAL) is an intentional equity strategy to improve community health and prevent chronic diseases caused in part by food insecurity. The HEAL Strategic Framework is a countywide road map to improve healthy eating and active living in the places where we live, work, learn, and play. It includes the strategic direction of "catalyzing the community to build healthy food systems," and the Marin Food Policy Council serves as the HEAL Implementation Team for this area of the Strategic Framework.

This fits well within the county's "4 E's" framework of Economy, Environment, Equity and Education. As the USDA states, *"Healthy eating is one of the most powerful tools we have to prevent the onset of disease."* Therefore, communities without access to healthy food simply do not have the resources needed to live a healthy and disease-free life. Through the described efforts, the Marin Food Policy Council and its member organizations are working to change this.



FOOD ACCESS: HEALTHY RETAIL

CONTEXT

The ability to access healthy, affordable, and local food close to home at supermarkets, grocery stores, and other retail food outlets directly impacts an individual's health. Communities with a lack of access to healthy foods, specifically "food deserts," have residents with poor quality diets, lower achievement scores, and higher rates of diabetes and obesity.⁸ Poor diets are also indicated in communities with an overabundance of cheap fast food restaurants or "food swamps."

In Marin, there are significant disparities in life expectancy and chronic disease across communities. On average, Marin City residents die 16 years earlier than Ross residents.⁹ High rates of sugar-sweetened beverage consumption and diet-related diseases, including obesity, diabetes, and other chronic diseases, are found in Marin County's communities of color. These same communities lack access to healthy, affordable food or have an abundance of unhealthy food and beverage outlets.

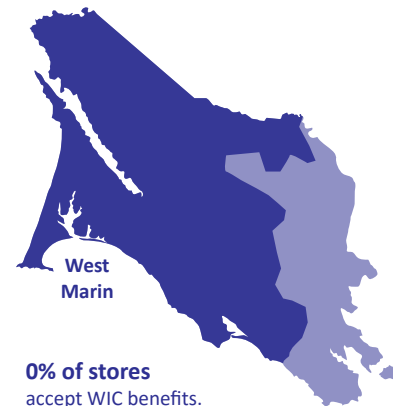
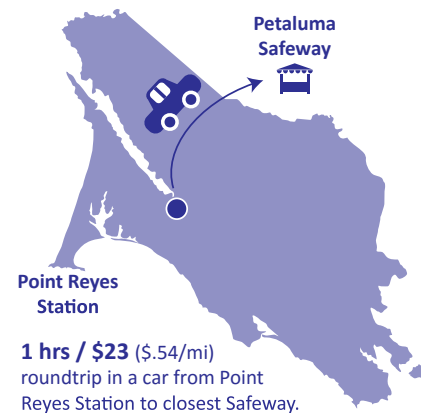
PROBLEM

Not all communities have equal access to healthy retail food options, and many seniors, youth, and low-income residents lack adequate transportation to get healthy and affordable food outside of their communities. The lack of access to healthy and local food through market-based solutions manifests differently in different communities throughout the county.

- Marin City does not have a single grocery store for its residents. It is a food desert.¹⁰ Residents have poor diets, and 75% of the adults are overweight or obese, which contributes to common diet-related diseases, including heart disease and diabetes.¹¹ A proposed Target for the Gateway Shopping Center is yet-to-be seen if it will provide sufficient access to healthy and affordable food to Marin City residents.
- The Canal, a predominantly Latino community, has many small convenience stores that provide limited healthy options and an abundance of unhealthy options, including junk food, sugar-sweetened beverages, alcohol, and tobacco.¹² Nearly 30% of Marin's Latino youth consume a soda and/or sugar-sweetened

beverage every day.¹³ The amount of sugar in a single soda exceeds the new 2015-2020 USDA Dietary Guidelines for Americans' recommendation for caloric intake from added sugar. Added sugar is the single largest contributor to diabetes, obesity and other chronic disease.

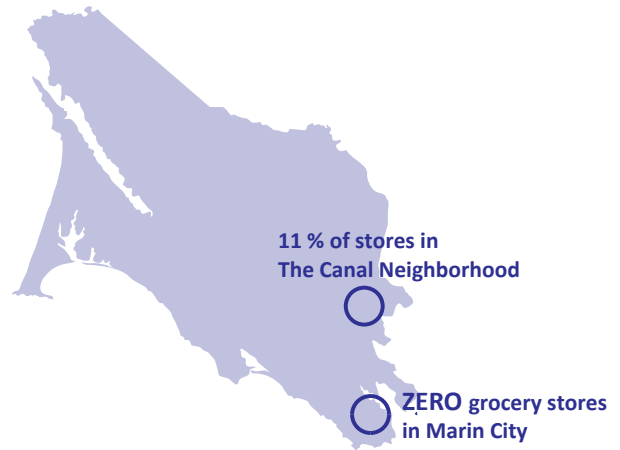
- In West Marin, food that is both healthy and affordable is hard to come by. The primary markets are expensive due to the tourist economy that they cater to, the necessary markup that accompanies small retail operations that lack economies of scale, and the long distances that distributors must travel to deliver product. This is compounded by the distances residents must drive to grocery stores and the unhealthy options that dominate the inventory of the local convenience stores. Furthermore, not a single retail food store in West Marin accepts WIC.





- Residents participating in Communities of Excellence in Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity Prevention (CX3) found that 0% of stores in Marin City and only 11% of stores in the Canal Neighborhood met “Neighborhood Food Store Quality” standards, indicate that whether local stores were safely accessible to neighborhood residents and offered healthy, affordable foods.

The ability to access healthy and local food close to home at supermarkets, grocery stores, and other retail food outlets is critical to food security. Access includes three primary components: (1) *physical access*, with retail food options located within close proximity to residents, (2) *financial access* through widespread acceptance of CalFresh and WIC at retail food outlets and affordable options, and (3) *widespread availability* of fresh fruits and vegetables, dairy, meat, and staple foods, and decreased availability and marketing of junk food, sugar sweetened beverages, alcohol, and tobacco.



meet “Neighborhood Food Store Quality” standards, offering healthy, affordable foods that are safely and easily accessible.

	MARIN CITY	THE CANAL & SAN RAFAEL	WEST MARIN
% of population living within a half mile of a supermarket or large grocery store	0%	50%	<i>unavailable</i>
proportion of supermarkets or large grocery stores with convenient public transit	0	0	0
supermarkets or large grocery stores	0	3	0
farmers’ markets	0	0	1
small markets and other food stores	0	0	4
convenience stores	1	7	8
fast-food outlets	3	7	0
ratio of fast-food outlets to population	1:934	1:1,542	<i>unavailable</i>



RECOMMENDATION 1

Pursue strategies and/or policies to ensure the establishment of comprehensive grocery stores in high priority areas, especially Marin City.

The Department of Health and Human Services, in collaboration with the Marin Food Policy Council, should propose a plan to pilot innovative neighborhood-based retail strategies, programs, and/or policies to ensure the success of a comprehensive grocery store in high priority areas, especially Marin City.

Report on the feasibility and economic impact of:

- Providing financial incentives to full-service grocery stores and other healthy retail food establishments in high priority areas, especially Marin City.
- Streamlining review and fast-tracking permits for full-service grocery stores in high priority areas, especially Marin City.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Pursue strategies to increase the availability of fruits and vegetables, and decrease the availability of sugar-sweetened beverages, tobacco, and alcohol in retail environments.

- A. The Department of Health and Human Services, in collaboration with the Marin Food Policy Council shall propose a plan to promote healthier retail environments for all of Marin County through prioritizing the sale of healthy items including fresh fruits, vegetables, and staple foods, and reduce the availability and marketing of tobacco, alcohol, and unhealthy foods and beverages in order to meet the health and nutrition needs of all Marin residents.

- B. The Department of Health and Human Services, in collaboration with the Marin Food Policy Council, shall support an effort to put an excise sugar-sweetened beverage tax measure on the 2017 ballot to be used to support community efforts to provide equitable access to healthy foods.
- C. The Department of Health and Human Services, in collaboration with the Marin Food Policy Council, the Marin City Community Service District, and Marin City CX3, shall develop supportive strategies and accountability measures that encourage Target to maintain a robust grocery section with fresh fruits, vegetables, and dairy, and limit the promotion and availability of sugar-sweetened beverages, tobacco, and alcohol within the proposed new store in Marin City.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Ensure a retail environment whereby WIC and CalFresh use is supported and rewarded.

- A. The Department of Health and Human Services, in collaboration with the Marin Food Policy Council, shall propose a plan to support the widespread acceptance of WIC and CalFresh Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) at all retail food outlets and direct-to-consumer venues.
- B. The Department of Health and Human Services, in collaboration with the Marin Food Policy Council, shall identify stable and long-term funding for CalFresh incentives to be provided across all Marin County farmers' markets and other direct-to-consumer marketing venues.



FOOD ASSISTANCE: CALFRESH

CONTEXT

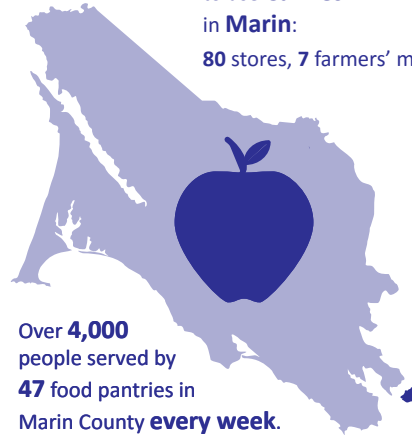
There are approximately 50,000 people in Marin County who are at risk of food insecurity.¹⁴ CalFresh, known nationally as SNAP and commonly as 'food stamps,' is our state's first line of defense against hunger. Funded through the Farm Bill, it supports 4.5 million Californians with an average monthly benefit of \$304 per household. In Marin, a little over 10,000 people are participating, with an average monthly benefit of \$220 per household per month that they can use at select grocery stores, farmers' markets and corner stores to buy food.

For people with a limited income, CalFresh provides stability — it is a vital resource in being able to purchase food for themselves and their families. Most households that receive CalFresh include children and elderly family members, our most vulnerable low-income neighbors. This benefit, which is accessed through an EBT (Electronic Benefits Transfer) card, which functions similarly to a debit card, allows families to supplement the food they are able to purchase themselves or that they may be receiving from their neighborhood food pantry. This gives families choice and agency around how they feed themselves and their families.

PROBLEM

The problem is that many Marin residents who qualify for the program are not receiving benefits. As a state, California is one of the the worst performing when it comes to enrolling eligible people. Only about 66% of eligible Californians are receiving benefits, compared to some of the best performing states like Oregon and Washington, where close to 100% of eligible people are enrolled. In Marin, estimates suggest that only about 50% of eligible people are enrolled.¹⁶ In other words, about

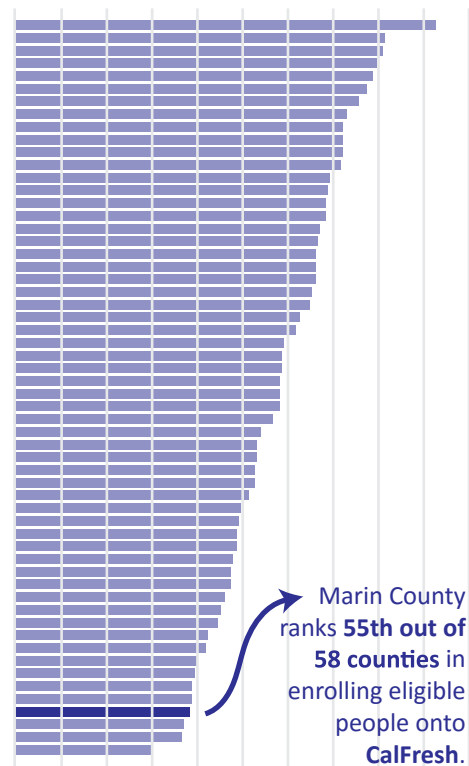
87 locations
to use **CalFresh**
in **Marin:**
80 stores, 7 farmers' markets.



10,000 people in Marin County are missing out on CalFresh and are continuing to struggle with hunger. In addition to providing stability for families, the use of CalFresh dollars spurs the economy. Last year, Marin County residents collectively received \$17 million in CalFresh benefits - which was all provided through federal funding (the USDA). In Marin, the County share of administrative costs (for CalFresh and CalWORKS combined) in the same year was only about \$600,000.¹⁷ In terms of stretching County funding for the biggest gains in reducing hunger, CalFresh represents the largest and most cost effective strategy. Not

enrolling the additional 10,000 eligible people on CalFresh means that we are missing out on \$21.6 million in federally funded benefits, representing \$38.6 million in lost economic activity.¹⁸

CalFresh in CA Counties:



2013 Program Access Index scores from California Food Policy Advocates



RECOMMENDATION 4
Facilitate connectivity and dual enrollment between Free and Reduced Price Lunch, and CalFresh by implementing AB 402.

Most people who are eligible for CalFresh are also eligible for other programs, such as Medi-Cal and Free and Reduced Price Lunch. In some cases, participation in one public program can mean automatic eligibility in another program.¹⁹ Recognizing Marin County’s commitment to reducing childhood health disparities, we recommend focusing dual-enrollment efforts on children and their families who are enrolled in School Lunch but are not currently on CalFresh. As a place to start, we recommend an initial focus on San Rafael, as 59% of school children are receiving School Lunch in the two school districts of San Rafael Elementary and High School Districts.

- A. Implement the intent of AB 402 across school districts in Marin County (initial emphasis on San Rafael),²⁰ enabling schools to share school meal application forms with H&HS. This will allow H&HS to initiate the CalFresh application process for interested families.
- B. Conduct targeted in-reach at schools in San Rafael. The above systemic policy solution should be complemented by an effort to interface directly with families at schools. Collaboration between H&HS, Marin County Office of Education, schools, and community-based organizations (CBO’s) could include:
 - Distributing informational material along with the school lunch application form.
 - Inviting outreach staff from CBO’s and eligibility workers from the county to participate in events at the beginning of the school year.
 - Organizing and hosting ‘CalFresh in a Day’ events at selected schools in San Rafael.²¹
- C. Develop targets and measure progress toward these goals.

	MARIN COUNTY	SAN RAFAEL*
Children receiving School Lunch	8,844 children	3,904 children ⁺
Children (aged 5-18) in CalFresh households	3,155 children	1,501 children*
Potentially CalFresh eligible children receiving School Lunch	5,689 children	2,403 children

**The San Rafael zip code is 94901, which is not completely congruent with the two San Rafael School Districts. This serves as a close estimate.
⁺San Rafael Elementary and High School Districts*

RECOMMENDATION 5
Implement an on-demand phone interview system for CalFresh applicants.

Difficulty in applying for CalFresh is often recognized as a key reason why counties around the state have low participation rates.²² In Marin, we have heard through conversations with the county and with clients that one key step where applicants (and people recertifying²³) become disengaged with their application process is at the point of scheduling their phone or face-to-face interview after submitting their initial application form. Currently, many clients miss their scheduled interview, which means that their CalFresh application remains unfinished. Without completing this required step in the application process, clients cannot start receiving benefits. In addition, scheduling and rescheduling interviews adds unnecessary work to the county’s already full workload.

One clear solution to this is to be able to offer ‘on-demand’ interviews (this option was made available in California in February 2014).²⁴ Instead of the client having to call the county to reschedule their interview for a future date, clients would be able to call the county for an on-demand





interview, thus eliminating issues with scheduling and phone tag. We see on-demand interviews as the most effective way to eliminate scheduling challenges entirely.²⁵

Improving the use of technology to better serve all Marin residents is a focus area in the County of Marin 5 Year Business Plan: 2015-2020.²⁶ We encourage the CalFresh program to also strive toward making the application process technologically innovative and modern.

- A. Increase the amount and type of data that are available about the call center from Avaya, the county's contractor.
- B. Collect robust data about interview scheduling, in order to understand how many people are not completing their application or recertification due to missed interviews.
- C. Determine the feasibility of implementing an on-demand interview system, which would eliminate difficulties with interview scheduling entirely. While this is a relatively new statewide effort, Orange County recently implemented an on-demand interview system for CalFresh recertification and thus could serve as an example.

RECOMMENDATION 6
Improve the client experience in applying for CalFresh.

Applying to public benefits like CalFresh can be a daunting experience. Families living on a low income may be especially constrained by lack of free time to visit the County office to submit paperwork, as they juggle multiple jobs while caring for children or older family members. On top of that, language or cultural barriers, worries about how public benefits may affect their immigration status, and lack of experience with complicated paperwork and application materials may be enough to dissuade families from applying at all. Making sure that applicants (and potential applicants) have a positive and supportive experience when they interact with the county is important in ensuring that people continue to apply for vital programs like CalFresh.

In the spring and summer of 2015, the Public Assistance Advisory Group²⁷ disseminated surveys to Marin residents who had applied to CalFresh or Medi-Cal in order to understand how they felt about their application experience. Below are results from one of the questions on the survey:

WHEN I MET WITH PUBLIC ASSISTANCE, I WAS TREATED WITH RESPECT AND DIGNITY BY (RATED 1-5):		
Reception/Greeter	56% Agree and Strongly Agree	3.57 Average Rating
Call Center	43% Agree and Strongly Agree	2.9 Average Rating
Eligibility Worker	48% Agree and Strongly Agree	3.15 Average Rating
Supervisor	32% Agree and Strongly Agree	1.98 Average Rating

Results from the 2015 Public Assistance Community Advisory Board Survey

Only about half of respondents felt that they were treated with respect and dignity when they interacted with county staff about their application, which suggests there is room for improvement when it comes to customer service.

- A. Continue to solicit feedback from CalFresh clients. There is currently no streamlined or clear way for people applying to (or who are currently enrolled in) CalFresh to submit feedback about their experience. Developing a data-driven system for capturing this type of feedback and reviewing it in a transparent way on a regular basis would demonstrate the county's commitment to improving the CalFresh experience and would allow for prioritization and implementation of those improvements.

COMMUNITY FOOD PRODUCTION

CONTEXT

While food access and assistance with healthy food is of vital importance, community food production and urban agriculture provides a longer-term, ecological, and educational solution to nutrition-based health problems. We are recognizing the importance of local, fresh food for nutrition and flavor, and food grown by urban farmers, home gardeners and community gardeners can provide much more. In fact, urban agriculture has been shown to raise home values, improve health, teach ecological stewardship, and build positive communities, raising the level of food security in low-income communities.²⁸

In World War II, growing your own food was made into a patriotic effort. For example, there were over 800 Victory Gardens in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park in 1943. This built the kind of resiliency needed during the war. Now, in the face of a changing climate, this is again becoming more necessary.²⁹ Then as now, decentralizing food production supports families at a more local, tangible level while teaching the public about nutrition and their environment.

Community food production hits upon a confluence of positive factors that support the four integral posts of Marin's mission: economy, environment, equity and education. With our strong West Marin farming community, and a shared sense of commitment to food equity, Marin can become a model for the country, as it is in many other arenas.

PROBLEM

As a part of the effort to alleviate food insecurity, local neighborhood food production can have a significant impact. However, many low-income residents as well as residents of apartment complexes and condos lack access to land, enough sun, technical support, additional water, or other materials (starts, soil, tools, planter beds) to grow some of their own food in residential gardens. Indeed, Marin's own farm workers may lack access to homegrown fresh food even while their work produces healthy food for far away grocers and farmers' markets. They too would benefit from kitchen gardens or community garden plots near where they live.

Up and down Marin's 101 corridor, demand for community garden plots outpaces supply.³⁰ Establishing new community gardens can be a lengthy, expensive, and politically complex endeavor. School gardens are widespread but operate with varying degrees of success. Many lack adequate infrastructure, stable funding, and consistent, sufficient volunteers or paid support necessary to provide an ongoing supply of produce for students and school kitchens, and/or an impactful educational program for all students. Educating the public about the advantages of growing some of their own food, and/or even selling some as a small income-producing effort is ongoing and could be enhanced. Edibles can be a part of a water-wise solution for homeowners converting from lawns, as well as for city landscaping, with proper maintenance. These latter options require public opinion to be supportive and educated regarding the benefits of urban agriculture. Coordinating and supporting Marin's hen and bee keeping policies would also support Marin's community food production.

Our recommendations focus on promoting small-scale, neighborhood-based food production and urban agriculture, including community and school gardening, as a means to educate about where our food comes from, expand access to healthy and local food, enhance community food security, and foster resilient communities. We need to look for comprehensive, all-inclusive programs that support one another and build community as they build gardens. We need to fund local food production support, including horticultural, nutritional and technical support, with staff to manage material and practical needs as well. We could look for private public crossover solutions that help cohere these efforts.





Research has shown that these kinds of local urban agricultural efforts have significant health benefits, particularly for low-income communities. This can include community, institutional, residential, and school gardens, as well as edible landscaping and front/backyard private edible gardens. Hens, bees, fish, and even small numbers of goats can be managed for urban agriculture. Studies show these approaches yield healthy outcomes. Community and home gardeners improve their healthy food access, support food security, and improve their health outcomes per a recent U.C. study out of San Jose, CA.³¹

- C. Advocate through a series of presentations at the Marin Office of Education and School Boards across the county to adopt comprehensive ‘garden/farm-to-school’ kitchen programs that nourish and educate our county’s children and their families, including community gardens/farms on school grounds.³⁵
- D. The Marin Food Policy Council, in collaboration with the Marin Municipal Water District and North Marin Water District, considers developing lower cost water rates or other incentives for urban agriculture, including community/school gardens and farms.³⁶

RECOMMENDATION 7
Promote and support small-scale, neighborhood-based, food production and urban/suburban agriculture.

- A. The Marin Food Policy Council, in collaboration with the County and City Planning Departments, explores the feasibility of annually preparing a list or map of vacant parcels, parkland, public utility lands, easements and other public lands that may be used for community gardening, urban agriculture, and community farming/ranching and making this information publicly available on the UC Cooperative Extension website.^{32,33} The current UCCE Marin interactive garden map may be useful in displaying this information, as will its app, now in development.³⁴
- B. The Community Development Agency, in collaboration the Marin Food Policy Council and local municipalities, considers developing incentives for new development projects to incorporate edible landscaping, resident and community food gardens, and rooftop gardens. This would include a front and/or backyard incentive program and technical assistance that promotes homeowners and renters in starting and maintaining household kitchen gardens. Focus would be on low-income areas, including senior and farmworkers’ housing areas.

RECOMMENDATION 8
Support policy changes that ease the way for school and community gardens.

- A. The Marin Food Policy Council and UCCE Marin, in coordination with individual municipalities and the county, will continue to:
 - 1. Work to have municipal zoning codes incorporate community gardens as a ‘permitted use,’ as well as other incentives for easing zoning restrictions for community gardening and farming
 - 2. Coordinate a list of ordinances for, and encourage, bee, hen, and goat keeping, and incorporate the possibility of more hydro- and aqua-culture in general city ordinances
 - 3. Encourage certification for food to be grown in homeowner front yards
 - 4. Permit food distribution through neighborhood “farm” stands as a way to support local enterprise programs
 - 5. Encourage use of commercial, industrial, faith-based, and rooftops³⁷ and privately held lands and areas through “joint use” agreements with community farmers/gardeners.



- F. The Marin Food Policy Council, in collaboration with UCCE Marin and Marin County will create a public service video describing and promoting the benefits of, and need for, local community food production in all its forms to educate the broader public of the advantages of urban agriculture, particularly in helping to resolve health disparities. It will address the advantages of Community Food Production, particularly in terms of the county's mission to promote the Four E's: Economy, Environment, Equity, and Education.
- G. The Marin Food Policy Council, with the county, municipalities and school boards, determines if the county's liability insurance might be extended to cover community gardens as is done with park land where necessary.

RECOMMENDATION 9

Support school and community gardens by identifying funding for support and promotion.

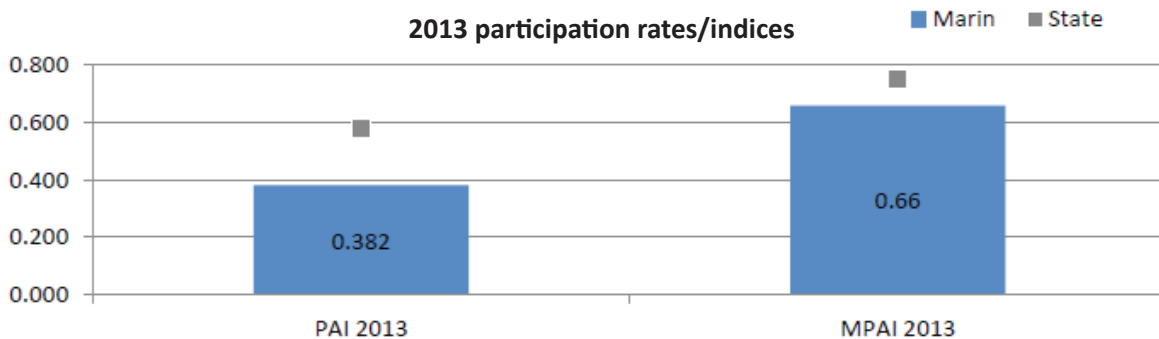
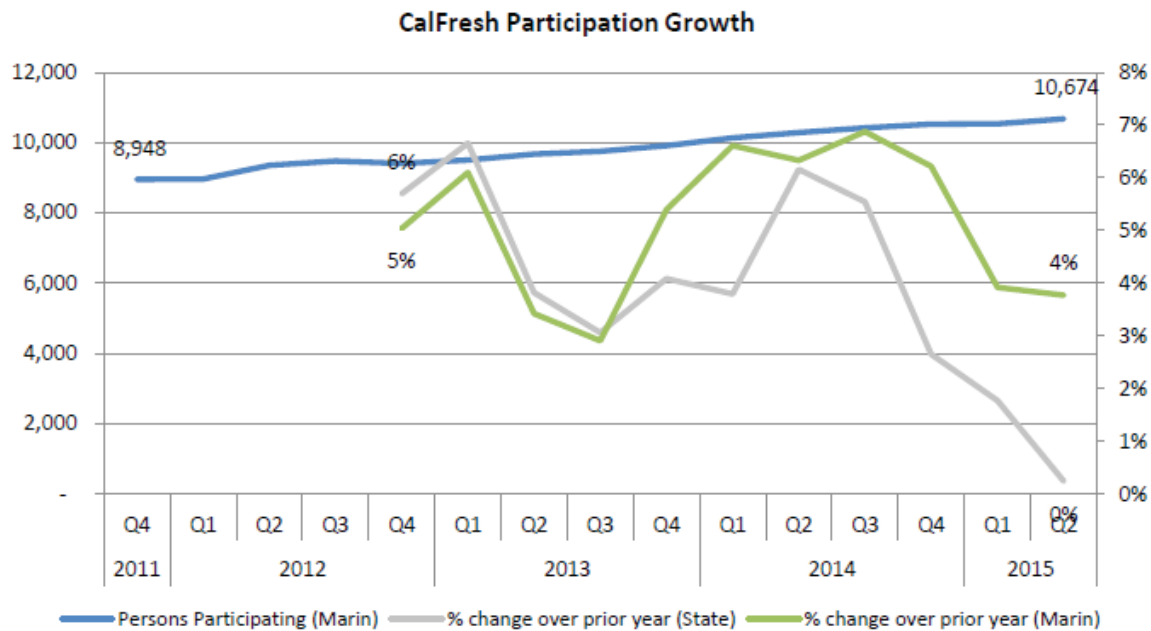
- A. The Marin Food Policy Council, in collaboration with Marin Health and Human Services, shall determine possible funding for tools, soil, starts, seeds, building materials and other hard costs for school and community gardens, in addition to helping to support Tool and Seed Libraries/Giveaways at libraries or other convenient locations around the county.
- B. The Marin Food Policy Council, in collaboration with UCCE Marin, Marin County and/or Marin Parks and Recreation Departments, will consider funding the equivalent of two part-time or one full-time staff member to help implement the above proposals, and provide consistent, reliable, comprehensive support for community food production in the county for at least two years.³⁸



APPENDIX A

CalFresh Participation Rate:

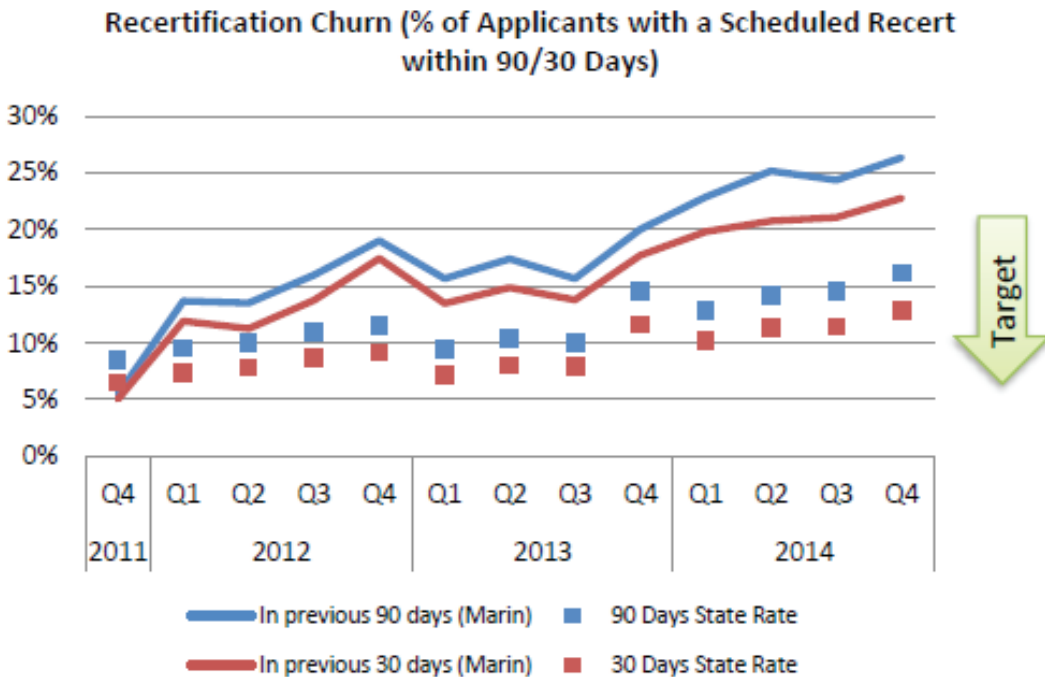
There are several methods used in California for determining the participation rate, that is the percentage of eligible people who are actually enrolled in the program. All calculations rely on estimating, to some degree, the number of people who are likely to be eligible based on their income, immigration status (undocumented immigrants are not eligible), and whether they participate in other public benefit programs (SSI/SSP recipients are not eligible). Especially in small counties like Marin, the margin of error can be wide in these estimates. Looking at the two common methodologies for calculating the participation rate, we can say that in Marin the participation rate is roughly 50%:



APPENDIX B

CalFresh Churn Rate:

Churn occurs when a CalFresh recipient stops receiving benefits and then reapplies within 30 or 90 days of when they were discontinued benefits. Often this occurs as a result of missed paperwork or an interview when the CalFresh recipient needed to recertify their information in order to stay on the program (currently every 6 months). In Marin, both the 30- and 90-day recertification churn is well above the state average, at 23% and 26% respectively, indicating that many people do not complete their recertification process successfully.



APPENDIX C

Marin Food Policy Council Membership - 2016

The Marin Food Policy Council has a total of 29 individual members and 18 organizational members, as of April 2016.

INDIV #	FIRST NAME	LAST NAME	PRIMARY ORGANIZATION/AGENCY AFFILIATION	ORG #
1	Peter	Healy	Agricultural Institute of Marin	1
2	Viktor	Westman		
3	Janet	Brown	AllStar Organics	2
4	Gail	Crain	Community Action Marin	3
5	Sierra	Smith		
6	Angela	Struckmann	County of Marin, HHS	4
7	Cio	Hernandez		
8	Elaini	Negussie		
9	Reba	Meigs		
10	Madeline	Nieto Hope	County of Marin, Waste Education, Public Information Coordinator	5
11	Marv	Zauderer	ExtraFood.org	6
12	Marnie	Jackson		
13	Steve	Schwartz	Interfaith Sustainable Food Collaborative	7
14	Veda	Florez	Latino Marin	8
15	June	Farmer	Marin City CX3	9
16	Bonny	White	Marin County Free Library	10
17	Miguel	Villarreal	Novato USD	11
18	Lori	Davis	Sanzuma	12
19	Alexandr	Danino	SF-Marín Food Bank	13
20	Becky	Gershon		
21	Sheila	Kopf		
22	Ana Paula	Kitos Vasconcelos	The Marin School of Environmental Leadership	14
23	Merone	Eckert		
24	Bonnie	Nielsen	UC Cooperative Extension Marin	15
25	Julia	Van Soelen Kim		
26	Lauren	Klein		
27	Socorro	Romo	West Marin Community Services	16
28	Kiely	Hosmon	Youth Leadership Institute	17
29	Casey	Poldino	Zero Waste Marin	18



ENDNOTES

1. <https://www.marinhhs.org/blog/2016-county-health-rankings>
2. County of Marin, Health & Human Services, Epidemiology 2016
3. <http://health.gov/news/dietary-guidelines-digital-press-kit/2016/01/top-10-things-you-need-to-know/>
4. California Food Policy Advocates
5. UCCE Marin. 2010. "Marin County Community Garden Needs Assessment." (<http://cemarin.ucdavis.edu/files/66838.pdf>)
6. UCANR files, Annotated Biblio: <http://ucanr.edu/sites/UrbanAg/files/185843.pdf>. (Lit Review on Urban Ag: <http://ucanr.edu/sites/UrbanAg/files/185846.pdf>)
7. <http://health.gov/news/dietary-guidelines-digital-press-kit/2016/01/top-10-things-you-need-to-know/>
8. <http://www.pbs.org/newhour/runtdown/the-socio-economic-significance-of-food-deserts/>
9. County of Marin, Health and Human Services, Epidemiology. 2016.
10. USDA definition
11. California Health Interview Survey, UCLA
12. 76.3%. A Portrait of Marin: Marin County Human Development Report 2012, Marin Community Foundation, pg 63.
13. http://ask.chis.ucla.edu/AskCHIS/tools/_layouts/AskChisTool/home.aspx#results
14. The SF-Marine Food Bank considers anyone living below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level as being food insecure. In 2013, 47,955 people were in this category (U.S. Census)
15. United States Department of Agriculture, Reaching Those in Need: Estimates of State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates in 2013 (2016) <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/ops/Reaching2013.pdf>
16. California Food Policy Advocates
17. Information shared by staff from Marin County Health and Human Services
18. California Food Policy Advocates, Lost dollars Empty Plates (2015) <http://cfpa.net/CalFresh/Media/PAI-LDEP-PressRelease-Marin-2015.pdf>
19. When the Affordable Care Act went into effect in 2014, Marin County successfully took measures to quickly and efficiently enroll eligible people into Medi-Cal. One process they employed was to automatically enroll people who were enrolling in CalFresh into Medi-Cal at the same time
20. In 2011, California passed a state law – AB 402 – which was intended to link School Lunch with CalFresh, enabling families to start the CalFresh application process with their School Lunch application form. School districts in Marin County have not yet implemented this practice. As a quick, efficient, and user-friendly way to enroll in multiple programs at once, HHS and the Marin County Office of Education, along with school districts in Marin County, should implement AB402. Implementation will require adding an option on the school lunch application form for families to opt-in to CalFresh, then the form would be shared with HHS so that they can start the CalFresh application process for that family
21. These are events that are hosted once a month in San Francisco, whereby clients are able to sign-up for CalFresh and walk away with an EBT card in one day
22. The basic guidelines and requirements for how each county's CalFresh application process should be designed is dictated both at the federal and state level, through the Food and Nutrition Services of the United States Department of Agriculture and the California Department of Social Services. However, within the boundaries of basic requirements, counties have much latitude in designing systems and procedures that are unique to that county
23. At the end of 2014, Marin County's 30-day churn rate was around 23% – meaning 23% of new applicants in any given month were on CalFresh 30 days ago, but stopped receiving benefits and then came back in to apply again. See Appendix B for more details.
24. All County Letter: <http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/lettersnotices/EntRes/getinfo/acl/2014/14-20.pdf> On-Demand Interview Form: <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/cdssweb/entres/forms/English/CF29B.pdf>
25. SF-Marine Food Bank & UC Berkeley Goldman School of Public Policy, Report: Modernizing the CalFresh User Experience (2016)
26. County of Marin 5 Year Business Plan: 2015-2020. http://marin.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=33&clip_id=7763&meta_id=811260
27. This group is no longer in existence, but a similar group has been formed with many of the same participants, and is facilitated by Cesar Lagleva
28. UCANR files, Annotated Biblio: <http://ucanr.edu/sites/UrbanAg/files/185843.pdf> (Lit Review on Urban Ag: <http://ucanr.edu/sites/UrbanAg/files/185846.pdf>)
29. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/49743684_Community_Gardening_A_Parsimonious_Path_to_Individual_Community_and_Environmental_Resilience
30. UCCE Marin. 2010. "Marin County Community Garden Needs Assessment." (<http://cemarin.ucdavis.edu/files/66838.pdf>)
31. <http://ucanr.edu/blogs/blogcore/postdetail.cfm?postnum=15750>
32. ie: <http://www.sacbee.com/news/local/education/article56156720.html>
33. <http://clerkwebsvr1.oaklandnet.com/attachments/14033.pdf> (Appendix 4: Blueprint for a Publicly Owned Vacant Land Inventory & Management Plan for Urban Agriculture Use, pgs 118-132)
34. http://ucanr.edu/sites/MarinMG/Community_Service_Projects/Community_Gardens_Map_839/
35. Marin examples to support: Conscious Kitchen.org, Sanzuma.org/Lori Davis, Gilo Rodriguez' West Marin Elementary School garden nutrition program, etc.
36. Examples: <http://sfwater.org/index.aspx?page=469>, <https://denverwaterblog.org/2015/09/15/save-water-grow-vegetables-instead-of-grass/>
37. <http://clerkwebsvr1.oaklandnet.com/attachments/14033.pdf>: IE: Oakland's "Rooftop Garden Resource Group" in conjunction with the Roofers Association trade group
38. If consistent, long-term support is not internalized as it is in many communities, (often through Parks and Rec Depts, as in Denver, San Francisco, Cleveland, San Jose, Oakland, etc.), these proposals will be very difficult to implement, particularly with the amount of fragmentation present in Marin County
39. The California Department of Social Services posts quarterly data on key metrics including participation levels, timeliness of application processing, dual enrollment between CalFresh and Medi-Cal, churn, and error rates. The SF-Marine Food Bank has developed three tools for analyzing those data in order to track successes and identify opportunities for improvement, which can be found here: <http://www.sfmfoodbank.org/calfresh-data-tools>
40. The California Department of Social Services posts quarterly data on key metrics including participation levels, timeliness of application processing, dual enrollment between CalFresh and Medi-Cal, churn, and error rates. The SF-Marine Food Bank has developed three tools for analyzing those data in order to track successes and identify opportunities for improvement, which can be found here: <http://www.sfmfoodbank.org/calfresh-data-tools>