November 18, 2022

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
1303 10th Street, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

Honorable Toni Atkins
President pro Tempore, California State Senate
1021 O Street, Suite 8518
Sacramento, CA 95814

Honorable Anthony Rendon
Speaker, California State Assembly
1021 O Street, Suite 8330
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Request $60 Million to Fully Fund The Local Equitable Access to Food (LEAF) Program

Dear Governor Newsom and Legislative Leaders,

We write to thank you for signing SB 907 (Pan) – the Local Equitable Access to Food (LEAF) Program – into law and for all your work in the ongoing fight to combat the food insecurity crisis across our state. The LEAF program expands Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) access at all certified farmers’ markets in California and also seeks to increase the number of farmers’ markets in low-income communities throughout our state. To meet the statutory requirements outlined in SB 907, our organizations respectfully request your support to fully fund the LEAF program in the upcoming budget. Specifically, we are requesting $20 million per year over three years, for a total of $60 million in one-time funding to establish and maintain the LEAF grant program which will be developed by the Department of Food and Agriculture along with the Department of Social Services. The grant funding could also be used to scale and improve EBT processes at existing farmers’ markets, establish EBT access at new certified markets in low-income communities, and develop nutrition education programs and outreach efforts.

Currently, more than a quarter of Californians are living in or near poverty. Low-income individuals and families that rely on the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), known as CalFresh in California, are issued an EBT card to access their food benefits. The current EBT system, however, presents many administrative and logistical hurdles that often prevent farmers’ markets from accepting EBT cards. The LEAF program presents an effective tool to increase access to healthy food and to fight food insecurity, especially during times of economic slowdowns and tight budgets. Moreover, a UC Davis study found that every dollar spent at a farmers’ market stimulates $1.86 in local economic activity, as the money goes directly into the pockets of local farmers, who tend to spend it locally as well.

Alchemist CDC, a nonprofit based in Sacramento that facilitates EBT services at local farmers’ markets, estimates that it would cost approximately $1,500 per market per month to ensure effective EBT access. With roughly 663 certified farmers’ markets in California, the total cost statewide would be roughly $13 million annually to provide every certified farmers’ market with a dedicated on-site EBT operator and sufficient
back-end administrative support. The remaining funds would be used to scale and improve EBT processes at existing farmers’ markets, establish EBT access at new certified markets, and develop nutrition education programs.

Farmers’ markets are an important source of low-cost, fresh fruits and vegetables for Californians in need of food assistance – and increasing EBT access at farmers’ markets will help improve nutrition outcomes in areas of California where food deserts exist. Additionally, for small and mid-sized farming operations, farmers’ markets provide an important economic benefit – a viable, local outlet for the sale of their produce. For the above reasons, our organizations respectfully request $60 million in one-time funding over three years to fully fund the LEAF program, which will expand access to EBT services at all certified farmers’ markets across California.

Sincerely,

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NextGen California (Co-sponsor)

Sam Greenlee
Alchemist CDC (Co-sponsor)

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