

KFAN 2024 Policy Priorities

Priority 1: Help feed more Kentuckians by improving Kentucky's safety net.

All Kentuckians deserve to have enough to eat, but too many of our neighbors have jobs that just don't pay enough to make ends meet and many more are just an accident, illness or new family member away from qualifying for safety net programs. Nutrition assistance programs help families keep food on the table, with [over 550,000 Kentuckians](#) currently participating in [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\)](#), 117,000 families participating in the [Women, Infants and Children's \(WIC\)](#) program and has provided over 2.5 million meals to older Kentuckians through the [senior feeding program in 2023](#), as of September. But not everyone is getting the help they could and the 2024 General Assembly has opportunities to improve access. All Kentuckians wherever they live; whether black, white or brown, younger or older, should be able to get help with food through state and federal nutrition assistance programs they are eligible for with respect and dignity and without judgment, stigma or guilt.

KFAN will prioritize policies that improve the vital supports these programs provide Kentuckians this year, for example:

Allow Kentuckians returning home from incarceration to quickly receive food assistance. When Kentuckians leave incarceration, they may struggle to find housing and employment and to get the medical care and nutrition they need, among other challenges. This legislative session, the General Assembly can support successful, healthy reentry by ensuring that Kentuckians returning home after incarceration quickly receive the SNAP food assistance they are eligible for. Kentucky can join the 11 states have received a federal waiver and implemented a [pre-release application program](#) so that people can apply for SNAP before their release and get help with groceries upon reentry.

Expand work supports through SNAP Employment & Training (SNAP E&T). By addressing barriers to work, we can ensure more Kentuckians are able to access work and education opportunities available, that means providing key supports like those used in the [Paths 2 Promise pilot program](#) including transportation, child care, internet access, education and job training. We can also expand and keep voluntary education and job training through SNAP E&T by increasing the number of opportunities available across the state and virtually, for example through Kentucky College and Technical Career System (KCTCS).

Increase funding for the Farmers' Market Nutrition programs. The [Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program \(SFMNP\)](#) and [WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program \(WIC FMNP\)](#) provides older adults and families with young children with low incomes help with buying local healthy foods at farmers markets. However current federal funding levels are inadequate. In 2021, WIC FMNP received only \$215,000 in federal funding. As a result of this inadequate funding, Jefferson County, with the highest WIC participation, has been excluded from WIC FMNP. Additionally, SFMNP is also inadequately funded, reaching only 12,000 out of the over 154,000 (7.8%) Kentucky seniors with low incomes. By providing \$150,000 in additional state funding each to the SFMNP and WIC FMNP programs we can ensure more Kentuckians with low incomes in every county can participate in these programs.

Continue to end the waiting lists for the Nutrition Program for the Elderly (senior feeding program) in the 2024 budget. Kentucky has the second highest food insecurity rate nationally for older adults over the age of 50. [Senior feeding program](#) administered by the Department for Aging and Independent Living, have provided over 2.5 million meals to older Kentuckians in 2023, as of September. By continuing to provide full funding in the 2024 budget for the senior feeding program, we can ensure that many older adults in Kentucky get the help with food assistance that they need.

Priority 2: Feed more hungry children and support education by providing more free school meals.

Access to free school meals is vital to academic success and student well-being. Currently 80% of Kentucky school districts participate in the federal Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) which provides free school meals to every student. [Due to recent USDA changes](#), an estimated 92.5% of schools will be eligible in 2024. But some of our highest-need schools face financial barriers to providing free school meals to all kids. Legislation filed by Senator Chambers Armstrong and Representative Aull would ensure that schools with a high identified student percentage are reimbursed for meals under the CEP at the paid rate. Schools with an identified student percentage of 60% or higher would be required to participate in the CEP starting the 2025-2026 school year. Transparency and reporting requirements are also included in the proposal.

Additional steps to improve student food access would be to incentivize schools to participate in the Farm to School program. Providing local food in schools is good for student health, farmers' and local economies. The [Farm to School Incentive fund](#) supports these critical goals, strengthens infrastructure for local food procurement, and improves data collection needed to coordinate local food systems. By providing the required \$1,000,000 to the Kentucky Department of Agriculture (KDA) for the Farm to School Incentive Fund, the General Assembly could incentivize more schools to participate in local food purchasing through \$0.20 payments per meal, just like Alabama has done.

Priority 3: Support local agriculture and food systems and feed more hungry Kentuckians by establishing the Healthy Farm and Food Innovation Fund (HFFIF).

Last year, [House Bill 384 \(HB 384\)](#) aimed to create a structured state fund capable of receiving state, federal, and private philanthropy funds to help Kentucky address food and nutritional security. The 2024 General Assembly has opportunity to continue this momentum by passing a bill to create a fund that would provide opportunities for farmers and support programs that feed hungry Kentuckians, such as Kentucky Double Dollars, Farms to Food Banks, and Fresh RX for MOMs—and pave the way for additional new efforts that support the vitality of Kentucky agriculture and the health of Kentuckians.

In addition to the three policy priorities, KFAN has two ongoing campaigns.

2023-2024 Farm Bill

The Farm Bill is the only comprehensive package of legislation passed every 5 years that governs a variety of funds and programs that directly impact every aspect of our food system from farm to table, including the livelihood of over 76,000 Kentucky farmers and over 550,000 of our neighbors facing food insecurity. That means the Farm Bill is vital to Kentucky agriculture, food systems and our communities.

[KFAN's priorities include:](#)

1. Ensure people of all ages, abilities and household sizes who need help putting food on the table get help, can get it through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and emergency food assistance programs.
2. Support local and regional food supply chains so farmers can market their products and Kentuckians can have healthy, affordable food options.
3. Support the future of Kentucky agriculture by providing all farmers - urban and rural, especially those historically underserved - with affordable access to land and resources.

Food as Medicine

Access to quality, nutritious foods can have tremendous impacts to health, particularly for older adults and children. [Growing evidence](#) has shown that programs that work to provide access to nutritious food or as part of a medical intervention can improve health, this is known as "food as medicine initiatives", "food is medicine", or "Food Rx". To improve health in Kentucky, it is important we are able to draw on existing state and federal resources to help fund food as medicine initiatives.

Healthcare insurers, Managed Care Organizations, and health service providers can support programs that help provide healthy foods as a tool for health, including surveying for food insecurity, nutrition or food prescriptions, providing medically-tailored meals, or providing on-site food pantries at health centers. Some Food as Medicine policy ideas KFAN members are exploring, include:

- [Utilize a Medicaid 1115 waiver](#) to use federal Medicaid funds to pay the direct costs of non-medical services for medically-tailored meals.
- [Utilize Medicaid Flexible Services](#) to help cover the cost of Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs).
- [Utilize Medicaid](#) and other health programs to directly-certify children for free school meals.
- Ensure Kentucky incentivizes participation in food is medicine initiatives in the Medicaid program, such as Food Prescription programs, through Managed Care Organization contracts.