Increased access to and awareness of healthy foods improves Coloradans’ health and quality of life, reduces healthcare costs, and helps to address food insecurity. While programmatic health investments have been primarily directed at acute care, preventative strategies, such as healthier diets, reduce the risk of chronic disease and health conditions, including heart disease, cancer, diabetes, stroke, and obesity. Recognizing this need, the state’s agencies are promoting healthy eating in a variety of programs. These are examples of just some of the ways Colorado’s state agencies are advancing access to, and consumption of, healthy foods.

The Colorado Department of Agriculture is committed to supporting a thriving agricultural industry in Colorado by supporting the state’s producers and advancing local food access. **Colorado-grown produce** include peaches, apples, melons, sweet corn, chiles, potatoes and lettuce. The agency’s **Community Local Food Access Program** supports work by non-profits and small food retailers, through grants and tax credits, to increase access to or lower prices for healthy food in low income and underserved areas of the state. This enables Coloradans to obtain fresh fruits and vegetables from small, corner, or convenience stores, on which many of the state’s residents depend for daily food.

**Healthy School Meals for All** at the Colorado Department of Education enables public schools participating in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs to provide nutritionally balanced free meals to all students. Incentives to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables and other products grown in Colorado, begin in 2024. Also at this agency, the **Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program** supports schools in providing children with fresh fruits and vegetables at no cost during the school day. The goal is to promote the consumption of fruits and vegetables among school-aged children, educate students about the benefits of fruits and vegetables, and expose them to new varieties.

The Colorado Department of Human Services will incentivize fruit and vegetable purchases among federal **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)** participants in a special pilot program to be launched in 2024. SNAP households who purchase qualifying fruits and vegetables will receive 100% of the dollars spent on the qualifying purchase back on their Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card to be redeemed on the purchase of any SNAP eligible food, up to $60 per month. Also at this agency, **Everyday Eats** is a food support program for qualifying Coloradans age 60+ to help keep healthy food staples in their kitchens. Known nationally as the Commodity Supplemental Food Program, participants can pick up a monthly package of foods with plenty of options to make nutritious, complete meals.

The **Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program**, a first in the nation effort funded by USDA, will support local food supply chains by purchasing local foods from socially disadvantaged farmers. The food will be distributed to underserved populations in need of nutrition support through food banks, food pantries, schools, or congregate feeding sites.
The Healthy Food Incentive Program at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment promotes statewide efforts to improve access to fresh Colorado-grown fruits and vegetables among Colorado’s low-income populations. This ensures that more families can enjoy healthy food, local farmers gain new customers, and more food dollars stay in the community. The agency’s Healthy Hospitals Contract builds healthier nutrition environments at hospitals throughout the state. Partner hospitals agree to promote breastfeeding and offer healthier food and beverage options to patients and their families, visitors, and staff. This agency also administers the federal Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), which provides food assistance, nutrition education, breastfeeding counseling and pumps, with certain income requirements.

Under the Colorado Department of Higher Education, the state’s public universities daily promote healthy eating. Colorado State University’s Eat Well at CSU offers nutrition stations within each dining center providing information about making healthy dietary choices, as well as nutritional programs and classes, and culinary events throughout the year. The University of Colorado is committed to serving delicious, innovative, sustainable and healthy food options to the CU Community. They participate in Menus of Change, which focuses on both health and sustainability.

The Colorado Department of Health Care Policy & Financing’s Home Delivered Meals Program delivers up to two nutritious meals daily to homebound clients who are unable to prepare their own meals and have limited or no outside assistance. It is available for individuals who meet Home and Community Based Service Waivers (HCBS). The program was expanded in 2022 and now provides assistance to individuals in transition from institutional settings or change in life circumstances to those recently discharged from a hospital stay. The agency also supports other state agencies’ state efforts to expand SNAP and WIC enrollment. Underway is an implementation study on the feasibility of Medicaid coverage for Home Delivered Medically Tailored Meals, Medically Tailored Food Packages, and Produce Prescription Programs. Based on research findings, HCPF will identify potential opportunities to cover Food is Medicine interventions.

Working in partnership with nonprofit organizations to expand state capacity

There are non-profit organizations throughout the state working with the states’ agencies to expand capacity to increase access to healthy food and alleviate hunger. Here are two examples:

1. Nourish Colorado administers Double Up Food Bucks, which complements SNAP. Through Double Up, SNAP recipients earn credits for their SNAP food purchases. For every SNAP dollar spent on purchasing Colorado-grown fruits and vegetables, the purchaser earns a $1 credit to put towards buying local produce, up to $20/day. This free incentive is helping Colorado families put healthy, nutritious food on their tables without causing financial strain.

2. Colorado Blueprint to End Hunger has run Colorado’s Food Pantry Assistance Grants. Food pantries connect people to food they need right away when weathering life’s storms. Thanks to the State of Colorado, we distribute grant funds to these organizations working directly in their communities so everyone can access healthy, local, and culturally relevant food options near where they live. The organization oversees more than $4.5 million in Colorado COVID-19 Emergency Hunger Relief Fund grants.