



FRUIT & VEGETABLE GAP ANALYSIS

Bridging The Disparity Between Federal Spending
& America's Consumption Crisis

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Industry Viewpoint: Federal spending and its role in increasing fruit and vegetable consumption

By

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There is a cadence in our society when it comes to problem-solving. We acknowledge the problem. We determine the cause(s) of the problem. We identify, prioritize and implement solutions. Then, the problem is (hopefully) solved.

We can agree that there is a pervasive and persistent fruit and vegetable consumption crisis — one made worse by COVID-19's effect on nutrition security — in our country and around the world. In the U.S., at least eight out of 10 consumers are not eating the recommended amount of produce daily, with fruits and vegetables being consumed, on average, 5.8 and 7.5 times per week, respectively. Further, eating occasions fell by nearly 10 percent between 2004 and 2020. Clearly, there's a problem.

We at [PBH](#) do not believe there's one solution to the chronic underconsumption of fruits and vegetables. Rather, there must be a multi-sector, comprehensive approach to 1) bolster fruit and vegetable intake; 2) reverse fruit and vegetable consumption declines now and into the future; and 3) realize the health and wellbeing benefits of fruits and vegetables through intakes that more closely resemble dietary guidance recommendations. Stakeholders across all sectors — from farmers, shippers, and packers to retail and foodservice leaders, to public health officials to policy makers, to nutrition educators and health professionals — must work together to develop an integrated and comprehensive roadmap for improved fruit and vegetable consumption.

The recently released Fruit & Vegetable Gap Analysis, developed by PBH in partnership with Nutrition On Demand, examines the role of the public sector spending, specifically within the federal government. Our analysis revealed that:

- To meet Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommendations, consumers must eat fruits and vegetables more frequently and in greater quantities — approximately 2.5 cups more per day.
- The cost of fruit and vegetable underconsumption in the U.S. was an alarming \$98.2 billion in 2020 and is projected to grow to \$137 billion by 2030. This is likely an underestimate.
- Very little funding is earmarked by Congress for fruit and vegetable promotion, specifically, funding for treatment of diet-related disease disproportionately outpaces prevention.
- The U.S. Department of Agriculture funding to support greater consumption of fruits and vegetables is woefully inadequate to correct long-standing patterns of underconsumption.
- While data indicate that poor diet and physical activity will soon overtake tobacco use as the leading actual cause of death in the U.S., the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is disproportionately funded for tobacco prevention compared to fruit and vegetable promotion.
- The National Institutes of Health research spending on fruits and vegetables and prevention projects has decreased over time.

Key recommendations

Given its impact on public health, fruit and vegetable consumption must be elevated as a national priority in Congress as well as within federal departments and agencies — with increased and dedicated funding. The Fruit & Vegetable Gap Analysis recommends increasing and earmarking funding for:

- Innovative clinical and consumer research, to support improved fruit and vegetable consumption behaviors;
- Intentional and improved fruit and vegetable access for all people, specifically focusing on empowering and motivating participants in food assistance programs to select and eat more fruits and vegetables, and addressing populations at disproportionate risk of chronic disease and nutrition insecurity; and
- Inspiring and action-oriented fruit and vegetable-focused nutrition education and promotion, highlighting positive and unifying messages to support consumption, while also reinforcing existing behaviors; appreciating and acknowledging individual needs, barriers, and successes; and motivating new, sustainable habits.

Federal fruit and vegetable success stories

As with any successful public health movement, much can be learned by doing the work and evaluating progress against stated goals. Below are two examples, which demonstrate how federal policy can positively impact consumption and improve diet quality:

- The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 has been associated with significant improvement in the nutritional quality of foods chosen by students, with children consuming more fruit and vegetables, through the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs.
- A benefit increase to purchase fruits and vegetables as part of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children program, provided during COVID-19, has been associated with increased fruit and vegetable consumption in children whose families receive benefits.

To read the full Fruit & Vegetable Gap Analysis report, visit fruitsandveggies.org/gapanalysis.

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