

# **Gov. Pritzker Signs Bill Establishing Farm To Foodbank Program In Illinois**

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CHICAGO - Governor JB Pritzker signed HB2879 into law today, establishing the Illinois Farm to Food Bank Program to expand resources for food bank systems across the state while supporting local farmers. The bill creates mechanisms for acquiring and distributing fresh fruits, vegetables, meat and poultry, dairy, and eggs to organizations providing free food for those in need. The program initially began with a pilot in 2021 with grant funding from USDA and is made permanent through this bill.

“Illinois farmers are producing some of the finest food in the country, and now that produce, dairy, and meat can go directly to Illinoisans struggling with food insecurity,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “It’s good for our farmers’ bottom line, it’s good for those in need, and it’s good for our state—a win for everyone in Illinois.”

The program, administered by the Illinois Department of Human Services with a \$2 million investment in FY24, seeks to address the strain placed on nonprofits and other organizations due to increased food bank usage while also supporting local farmers. During the two years of the pilot program, nearly 2.5 million pounds of food were donated.

Food acquired via this program must be from Illinois producers and must meet market-grade quality and consumption levels. However, much of the food going to the program is excess food that would have been wasted without foodbanks as an outlet. The lack of centralized donation program was a barrier to farmers looking to donate in the past.

The bill also includes capacity-building grants for capital improvements needed to store and transport fresh food to better reach underserved communities. The program focuses on fresh and nutritious foods, which are often difficult to secure at many food banks. The bill also creates a Farm to Food Bank Advisory Council to support and advise the work of the program and establish and build relationships with agricultural producers.

“Illinois’ number one industry is agriculture, and we are building the vision that ensures every community can benefit from the bounty our state produces. As Chair of the Governor's Rural Affairs Council, it is clear that we get closer to that vision by building strong relationships with our local farmers. The Farm to Foodbank Program provides a pathway to do just that,” said Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton. “Through this bill, we will lead in expanding resources for our food banks, and ensuring that our communities can access healthy, fresh foods. In Illinois, we will continue to advocate for those in need and bolster the connections between our farms and families' kitchen tables.”

“No one should go hungry in our great state. By expanding the Illinois Farm to Food Bank Program, we can ensure that more fresh and nutritious food reaches those who need it the most. This program will not only help address food insecurity but also support our local farmers and strengthen our communities,” said IDHS Secretary Grace B. Hou.

“We are overjoyed that Illinois will now have an established Farm to Food Bank program,” said Kate Maehr, executive director and CEO of the Greater Chicago Food Depository and co-chair of the Illinois Commission to End Hunger. “This program will provide economic opportunities for Illinois farmers, ensure additional fresh produce to

supply food banks and pantries across the state, and most importantly provide nourishment for families at risk of food insecurity. We are grateful to Governor Pritzker and members of the Illinois General Assembly for making this critical decision to invest in the health of our neighbors.”

“This bill ticks all the boxes for everyone involved, from farmers with surplus products, to food banks with more requests than they can fulfill, and our families who need better access to food – particularly fresh produce,” said State Senator Linda Holmes (D-Aurora), chief sponsor of the legislation. “It’s been in the works for several years and I thank the Greater Chicago Food Depository, Feeding Illinois, Department of Agriculture Director Jerry Costello and his staff, and all our proponents for their guidance throughout the process.”

“Combating food insecurity is a crucial part of any serious attempt to address injustice and economic inequality,” said State Representative Sonya Harper (D-Chicago). “Increasing the availability of healthy food by connecting food banks with fresh agricultural produce from Illinois farms will give more families and farmers the means to live better lives.”