

# Gov. Pritzker Signs Legislation to Address Food Deserts Across Illinois

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**METRO EAST** – Today, Governor JB Pritzker signed Senate Bill 850, which establishes the Illinois Grocery Initiative – a multi-pronged policy designed to address food deserts across the state. It will support existing grocers and encourage new grocery stores to open through incentive opportunities. The legislation also allows grocery stores receiving grants as part of the program to be designated as High Impact Businesses, providing them the opportunity to receive tax credits and other incentives.

“The Illinois Grocery Initiative is the latest expansion of our holistic approach to ensuring Illinois families can reach the big building blocks of a good life,” **said Governor JB Pritzker**. “When our residents struggle to keep a roof over their head, can’t put food on the table, or have to choose between paying for basic medical care and keeping the lights on—that’s a failure of the system. That’s why I’m proud to sign into law the Illinois Grocery Initiative—a first of its kind \$20 million investment to open or expand grocery stores in underserved rural towns and urban neighborhoods.”

"Every community deserves fresh, nutrient-dense food, and the investments that will be made through the Illinois Grocery Initiative will expand food access and take us to the next level in our mission to uplift all Illinoisans," **said Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton**. "Whether you live in a rural area or in an urban area, our administration is taking the next great steps to ensure communities statewide have the resources to live well and thrive."

Through the Illinois Grocery Initiative, \$20 million will be invested in addressing food deserts, with the majority supporting grocers in these areas. The program will provide wrap-around support to local governments and independent grocers opening grocery stores in food deserts, which includes providing technical assistance, feasibility studies and marketing, support with operational costs and access to capital funding for the acquisition of land, facilities, or equipment. Up to 20 percent of program funding may be used for grants for energy-efficient equipment upgrades to existing independently owned, cooperative, and for-profit grocery stores.

In order to gather a full understanding of the proliferation of food deserts and food insecurity in Illinois, the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) will commission a study to explore reasons for market declines, historical disparities for access to food, potential policy solutions, geographic trends, the role of independent grocers, and more. The study is designed to inform potential future iterations of program resources.

Grocers receiving grant support from the Illinois Grocery Initiative will be eligible for the High Impact Business Program to bring down their costs of operations. This includes tax exemptions on utilities and building materials.

“Nobody should have to drive hours to access healthy produce, and the Illinois Grocery Initiative will provide reliable food access to families living in food deserts,” **said DCEO Director Kristin Richards**. “Investing in new and existing grocery stores will spur economic development in the communities that need it the most.”

“This new law serves as a critical resource and lifeline to those who have been impacted by food deserts across our state,” **said State Sen. Dale Fowler (R-Harrisburg)**.

“Access to fresh, nutritious food can be hard to find, especially in the 59th District. The signing of this bill is a big step in the right direction as we work towards eliminating our great state's food insecurities.”

“The Grocery Initiative Act is a crucial step toward ensuring equitable access to healthy food for all residents of Illinois,” **said State Sen. Christopher Belt (D-Swansea)**. “No person should have to travel great distances to find fresh food. By providing financial assistance to grocery stores, we can incentivize the establishment and expansion of stores in areas that are considered food deserts.”

"A lack of access to healthy, fresh food contributes directly to higher rates of heart disease and diabetes, as well as increased frequency of anxiety and depression. These problems hamper economic growth, so when communities anywhere struggle with food access, we all pay the price," **said State Rep. Mary Beth Canty (D-Arlington Heights)**. "By making serious investments in small businesses, we will combat these debilitating problems while helping businesses across the state flourish. Enshrining this bill into law is a great step towards cracking down on food insecurity and moving Illinois forward."