

# **Pritzker Announces \$3.5 Million Available in Grants for Local Grocers to Preserve Access to Fresh Food**

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**CHICAGO** – Governor JB Pritzker and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) today announced \$3.5 million in available grant funding for local grocers through the Equipment Upgrades Program as part of the Illinois Grocery Initiative. These grants will provide funding for energy-efficient equipment upgrades for existing grocery stores, with priority given to those located in food insecure communities across the state. Grantees will be selected through a competitive Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) process.

“Local grocery stores are the backbone of food-secure and healthy communities, and investing in upgrades for these local pillars grants them the stability needed to continue serving local needs and ensuring access to fresh food,” **said Governor JB Pritzker.** “This grant program will help offset energy costs and form a greener infrastructure, a win-win that makes our state stronger and battles food deserts in the communities most at-risk.”

The Equipment Upgrades Program is the first program rolled out as part of the Illinois Grocery Initiative’s multi-pronged efforts to combat food insecurity by supporting local grocers and combatting food deserts. Additional funding opportunities for new municipal and independent grocery stores will be announced to the public soon.

“Access to fresh, nutrient-dense, culturally relevant food should be a right, not a privilege. The Equipment Upgrades Program will revitalize grocery stores working hard to feed, employ, and care for our most vulnerable neighbors,” **said Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton.** “The Illinois Grocery Initiative supports grocers who then support growers, further proving how Ag Connects Us All. When we invest in agriculture, we uplift Illinois’ biggest industry and get closer to ending food insecurity in every community.”

This program is designed to strengthen existing grocery stores and preserve access to fresh food in food insecure communities, in an effort to stop the formation of new food deserts. In order to support businesses most in-need, eligible applicants must be independently-owned grocers with fewer than 500 employees and no more than four grocery stores. Grocery stores located in food deserts as defined by the [USDA map](#) are prioritized for this initiative.

“This is a critical first step in our collective efforts to address food deserts across the state through the Illinois Grocery Initiative,” **said DCEO Director Kristin Richards.** “Investing in existing local grocery stores and ensuring they have the equipment needed to operate efficiently will not only spur economic development but also ensure reliable food access for the families in communities that need it most.”

“These grants are important to helping existing small grocers control energy costs and helping them remain viable and serving their communities,” **said Illinois Retail Merchants Association President and CEO Rob Karr.**

“Every Illinoisan deserves easy access to fresh, healthy produce, no matter where they live,” **said Economic Security Project Senior Advisor Ameya Pawar.** “Through the Illinois Grocery Initiative, the State of Illinois is investing in local grocers across the state which will combat food insecurity while bolstering economic development in communities that are most in need.”

With rising energy costs, outdated equipment presents a major expense for small community grocers. Under the Equipment Upgrades Program, eligible grocers may be eligible to receive grants for the following equipment upgrades:

- Heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) equipment
- Refrigeration units and freezers
- Lighting systems
- Other systems providing significant energy savings

Qualified applicants can apply for grants between \$25,000 to \$250,000, with a 1:3 match required. Applications for this round of grants will be accepted until March 4, 2024, at 5:00 p.m. To view the NOFO and apply for the grant, please visit the [DCEO website](#).

To help applicants prepare to apply for funding, DCEO will be holding a [webinar](#) at 10 a.m. on January 31 and a [webinar](#) at 2 p.m. on February 8. Interested parties are encouraged to reach out to [CEO.GrantHelp@illinois.gov](mailto:CEO.GrantHelp@illinois.gov) for application assistance.

“Families in every corner of Illinois deserve to have access to fresh, healthy food in their own communities,” **said House Speaker Pro Tempore Jehan Gordon-Booth (D-Peoria).** “The State of Illinois is not only fighting to make sure families have food on the table, but also fighting to ensure that food is fresh and nutritious enough to positively impact the livelihoods of Illinoisans.”

“The Illinois Grocery Initiative was designed to combat food deserts across the state, and this first step of the initiative will make a tremendous impact on Illinois families,” **said Sen. Chris Belt (D-East St. Louis).** “By supporting grocers through critical equipment upgrades, the State is preserving and increasing access to fresh food in the communities that need it the most.”

“As a sponsor of the Illinois Grocery Initiative, I'm thrilled to see The Equipment Upgrades Program come to fruition,” **said Rep. Mary Beth Canty (D-Arlington Heights)**. "This grant funding is an essential first step in ensuring every family across Illinois has access to fresh and healthy food options in their community."

“Supporting our local grocers through this initiative is a tremendous achievement,” **said Sen. Assistant Republican Leader Dale Fowler (R-Harrisburg)**. “Ensuring our communities have healthy food options is crucial to the well-being of Illinoisans, particularly in the rural parts of the state, that have been greatly impacted by food insecurity.”

## **About the Illinois Grocery Initiative**

The Illinois Grocery Initiative will provide wrap-around support to local governments and independent grocers opening grocery stores in and those currently operating in food deserts as authorized by PA 103-0561. The initiative has a detailed list of efforts to combat food insecurity across the state that includes:

- Providing support for existing grocery stores by offering grant funding for energy-efficient equipment upgrades.
- Supporting the establishment of new stores by providing grant funding for establishing new grocery stores in food deserts. These grants will support building /renovation, equipment, and first-year operational expenses.
- Providing technical assistance to prospective applicants and grantees. Technical assistance will include business planning, marketing, financing, supply chain management, and workforce development assistance as needed.
- Expanding tax incentive eligibility to grocers which includes exemption from tax on utilities and building materials.
- Commissioning a Grocery Initiative Study to explore the many factors that lead to the current circumstances regarding food insecurity.