



# **Gov. Pritzker Announces New Grocery Initiative Grant Opportunity**

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**CHICAGO** - Today, Governor JB Pritzker and Lieutenant Governor Juliana Stratton joined food justice advocates and local stakeholders to announce a new grant program

from the Illinois Grocery Initiative. The New Stores in Food Deserts Program will offer competitive grants to encourage the establishment of new grocery stores in USDA-defined food deserts. Paired with the Equipment Upgrades Program, the initiatives are a \$20 million effort to address food deserts and prevent grocery store closures in Illinois.

“The truth is: too many people live in food deserts, and it’s contributing to an ongoing public health crisis. As we celebrate the launch of our second Illinois Grocery Initiative grant program today, we aim to support local entrepreneurs and communities as they open new grocery stores in food deserts.” **said Governor JB Pritzker.** “This is a first-of-its-kind state government investment — and it will have a significant impact on under-served rural towns and urban neighborhoods dealing firsthand with the struggles of food access.”

Awards can range between \$160K to \$2.4M, with a 1:3 match requirement from businesses.

Requirements for grocery locations include:

- Must be located in a food desert,
- Must earn less than 30% of revenue from alcohol and tobacco sales,
- Must accept SNAP and WIC, and
- Must contribute to diversity of fresh foods available in community.

Qualified entities include units of local government and independent grocers or cooperatives with fewer than 500 employees and no more than four grocery locations. New Stores in Food Deserts grants will fund construction and renovation costs for new stores, as well as many first-year operations costs, such as employee wages, utility costs, initial inventory of food, and more.

"The Equipment Upgrades Program and New Stores in Food Deserts Program are perfect examples of the good government can do. Every community—urban and rural—deserves access to fresh, nutrient-dense, and culturally relevant food," **said Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton.** "1 in 4 Illinoisans live in a food desert, many crossing county or even state lines to reach the nearest grocery store. Incentivizing local, independent grocers is a way to help eliminate food deserts and that is a win-win for everyone."

In August, Governor Pritzker signed Senate Bill 850, establishing the Illinois Grocery Initiative to address food deserts across the state with a \$20 million pilot program. Through support for existing grocers and incentives for new stores to open in underserved communities, the legislation aims to ensure Illinois residents and families have access to affordable and nutritious food options.

“The State of Illinois is working to combat food insecurity rolling out essential programs such as New Stores in Food Deserts through the Illinois Grocery Initiative,” **said DCEO Director Kristin Richards**. “Illinoisans deserve to have access to fresh, nutritious food, and this grant program will increase access while bolstering local economies and creating new jobs in historically underserved areas.”

The first grant program, the previously announced Equipment Upgrades Program, provides grants for energy-efficient equipment upgrades in grocery stores to prevent closures. In order to support businesses most in need, \$3.5M in grant funding will be awarded to chosen applicants: eligible independent-owned grocers with fewer than 500 employees and no more than four grocery stores. Locations in food deserts (defined by USDA) will be given priority. Applications for the first round of this funding are now closed and in review.

To offset rising energy costs for small community grocers, grants will fund:

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

To view the competitive Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) and apply for the grant, please visit the [DCEO website](#). Interested parties are encouraged to reach out to [CEO.GrantHelp@illinois.gov](mailto:CEO.GrantHelp@illinois.gov) for application assistance. To help applicants prepare to apply for funding, DCEO will be holding a technical assistance webinar at 1:30 p.m. on [April 17](#) and at 10:30 a.m. on [April 23](#).

Additional efforts towards equitable food access include \$10M for the Illinois Grocery Initiative in the Governor’s recent proposed FY25 budget, as well as the Governor’s proposal to permanently eliminate the state grocery tax.

“As a proud supporter of equitable access to nutritious food, I’m thrilled to learn of the latest steps the Illinois Grocery Initiative has made in combating food insecurity statewide,” **said Senator Christopher Belt (D-Swansea)**. “The Equipment Upgrades Program and the New Stores in Food Deserts Program represent critical investments in our communities, providing vital support to independent, nonprofit and co-op grocery stores. Today’s announcement reaffirms our commitment to ensuring no resident goes without affordable, healthy food.”

"No Illinois family should ever go without access to nourishing, affordable food- especially fresh produce. That problem doesn't just hurt local communities, it carries negative impacts across Illinois," **said Rep. Mary Beth Canty (D-Arlington Heights)**.

"Restoring consistent supplies of high-quality groceries to families in underserved areas will bring enormous physical and mental health benefits to those communities, which eventually bolsters economies across Illinois."

"As a strong supporter and chief-co sponsor of the Illinois Grocery Initiative, today's grant funding announcement brings new hope for our food desert communities, ensuring that access to affordable, healthy foods will be close to home," **said Senator Dale Fowler (R-Harrisburg)**. "Communities across our state and in Southern Illinois deserve access to nutritious foods without having to drive long distances to find it. Proper nutrition is essential to sustaining lives and promoting good health and I look forward to seeing this initiative grow."

"Everyone deserves access to fresh, nutritious food – regardless of where they live – made available to them through sustainable practices," **said Senator Mike Simmons (D-Chicago)**. "The Illinois Grocery Initiative will help fight food insecurity by empowering our local food providers, like mom and pop corner stores, co-ops, and independently owned grocers, to provide the best food possible to our communities."

"Food insecurity has been a challenge to navigate statewide. About one in four Illinois residents live in an area determined by USDA guidelines to be a food desert," **said Rep. Hoan Huynh (D-Chicago)**. "I look forward to seeing how our grocery partners across the state will utilize these resources to tackle food insecurity and increase access to fresh and nutritious food options."

"This new critical funding will empower local organizations throughout the state to confront one of the most pressing challenges of our time -- food insecurity," **said Rep. Nick Smith (D-Chicago)**.

"A healthy public is critical for a functioning state," **said Rep. Kelly Cassidy (D-Chicago)**. "Our efforts as a state government to improve Illinois rely on providing underserved communities with quality, fresh fruits and vegetables through co-op, non-profit, and independent grocery stores. Millions of Illinoisans today face hunger, malnutrition, and food insecurity, because we have not taken the bold step of addressing these issues head on. This record funding turns the tide in our fight against hunger and marks the beginning of our effort to bring accessible fresh food to communities in every corner of our state. Food deserts should no longer be a reality. Access to fresh fruits and vegetables is a human right and should not be a segregated luxury for only certain populations."

"Today's announcement by the Governor marks a historic step forward in our efforts to eradicate food deserts and ensure every Illinoisan has access to healthy, affordable food," **said Ameya Pawar, Senior Advisor at the Economic Security Project**. "There

are currently 3 million Illinoisans living in food deserts, who face higher rates of chronic disease, economic insecurity, and shorter life spans—in large part because large chains have forced small grocers out of business and abandoned rural and urban areas alike. Supporting public-owned grocery stores through these grants is a smart, proven solution to meet the needs of communities and ensure markets work for everyone.”