



**Nutrition  
Incentive Hub**

CREATED BY GUSNIP NTAE CENTER

## **How GusNIP Nutrition Incentives Work: A Theory of Change**

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# Theory of Change Overview

A [theory of change](#) (TOC)<sup>1,2</sup> describes how and why a program is expected to produce a desired change or impact. It first identifies the program’s goals and then describes how its structure and activities lead to a set of outcomes that subsequently lead to the goals. Additionally, a TOC considers existing evidence, places the program within the larger environmental context of factors that affect its activities and outcomes, and identifies assumptions about existing conditions needed for program success. A TOC is a dynamic, living theory that evolves as the program grows and matures, new evidence emerges, and the environmental context changes.

The **Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP or program)**<sup>a</sup> TOC is specific to the **nutrition incentives** (incentives) component of GusNIP which funds **projects** that provide consumers participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) with financial incentives to spend on **fruits and vegetables (FVs)**. GusNIP also includes produce prescription projects offered by health care providers who give participants a “prescription” that can be redeemed for fresh FVs. This TOC does not include produce prescription projects given the different activities and methods used by nutrition incentive projects.

**Nutrition Incentives (incentives)**

Nutrition incentives provide a “match” amount of funds for families participating in SNAP to spend on additional purchases of FVs at participating **retail food stores** (e.g., grocery stores) and **farm direct retailers** (e.g., farmers markets).

The GusNIP TOC was developed to provide a shared understanding of how the program works among **GusNIP grantee organizations (grantees)**, other organizations partnering with grantees to implement projects (**local partners**), **GusNIP national partners**, evaluators, and funders. It offers a framework to foster collaboration and communication across the GusNIP network, support program and project development, and strengthen evaluation. The TOC was developed based on a review of GusNIP documents (e.g., the [GusNIP 2021 Request for Applications](#)), published evidence pertaining to nutrition incentives, and discussions with a subset of GusNIP partners, grantees, and project participants through interviews, workshops, and focus groups. This TOC reflects the experiences and understanding of those who participated in this process but may not represent the experiences and understanding of the broader nutrition incentive field.

Appendix A contains a glossary of terms. Terms included in the glossary are in **bold** the first time they appear in this document. Appendix B provides a complete overview of the TOC development process. Appendix C includes examples of activities that lead to GusNIP outcomes. Appendix D describes the environmental context of GusNIP. Appendix E describes program assumptions. The full-scale diagram is pictured on the next page.

The GusNIP TOC starts with the GusNIP foundation of national organizations and grantees that support and implement the program. They launch local and state projects that increase participant desire to purchase and consume FVs, encourage local farmers to supply FVs at retail food stores and farm direct retailers, and support local food retailers to provide FVs and accept incentives in community-friendly settings. As a result, participants buy more FVs, which leads to increased FV consumption and improved food security among participants and expanded economic benefits for participants, farmers, and retailers. Ultimately, these outcomes contribute to improved community health and economic well-being and support the development of just and diverse local and regional food systems. The TOC is summarized in the diagram above. This narrative report provides more details on how GusNIP nutrition incentives work. Each section of the narrative corresponds to each section of the diagram as indicated by section headings.

<sup>a</sup>Definitions are provided for terms in bold in Appendix A.

# How GusNIP Nutrition Incentives Work: A Theory of Change

Informed by GusNIP partners, grantees, and people participating in SNAP.



## Start Here:

### Foundation of GusNIP USDA funds the GusNIP program

#### National partners and scientific advisors support grantees (Nutrition Incentive Hub and GusNIP NTAE).

- Provide technical assistance (e.g., program implementation)
- Convene a learning community of grantees and nutrition incentive practitioners
- Facilitate reporting of data on program implementation and outcomes
- Offer guidance for evaluation of local programs

#### Grantees implement local programs and strengthen the national GusNIP program.

- Have the skills, capacities, and resources to succeed
- Are connected, networked, and coordinated with retailers, farmers, people participating in SNAP, and others
- Provide data for evaluation and reporting
- Share information about their communities and programs with national organizations and scientific advisors

#### Grantees aim to implement GusNIP equitably with support from national partners.

- Value and implement equity-centered local programs
- Know about and respect local community norms, values, and priorities
- Engage communities in program leadership, design, implementation, and evaluation
- Develop equitable communication and decision-making processes that share information and power with communities

## GusNIP Nutrition Incentive Outcomes

Increased fruit and vegetable purchases and consumption

Improved food security

Expanded economic benefits for participants, farmers, and food retailers



## Pathways

### Participants want fruits and vegetables and participate in nutrition incentive programs

- Know about nutrition incentives and how to use them, and trust the nutrition incentive program
- Want to eat fruits and vegetables and have the knowledge and resources to prepare them
- Perceive that nutrition incentives make fruits and vegetables more affordable

### Local farmers supply fruits and vegetables at some retail food stores and farm direct sites

- Know about and support the nutrition incentive program
- Have capacity to produce and sell products preferred by participants
- Distribution channels are available

### Food store and farm direct retailers are accessible, welcoming, and provide fruits and vegetables to participants

- Know about nutrition incentives and value participants
- Have infrastructure, technology, and capacity to process nutrition incentives and sell fruits and vegetables
- Offer affordable, culturally appropriate, high-quality fruits and vegetables desired by participants

## Participants Buy More Fruits & Vegetables

Nutrition incentives make fruits and vegetables more affordable for participants. Larger incentive amounts provided over a longer duration may increase the amount of fruits and vegetables purchased and consumed. Smaller incentive amounts distributed to more people may allow for greater community reach.

**Equity**  
GusNIP-funded projects engage a network of diverse partners and participants who provide expertise, guidance, and accountability for equitable program planning, implementation, and evaluation.

## Ultimate Goals

- Improve community health and economic well-being and decrease health and wealth disparities
- Sustain and expand a diverse and just local/regional food system including support for small and medium sized farms

## GusNIP Background

Eating FVs is associated with decreased risk of chronic diseases, including cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, and some types of cancer.<sup>3-6</sup> Yet, many Americans do not consume recommended amounts of FVs, and FV intake is lower among people who experience low income.<sup>7,8</sup> FVs are often more expensive than less healthful foods, such as packaged convenience meals and snack foods. Many households with low incomes cannot afford to purchase sufficient quantities and varieties of FVs to meet consumption levels recommended by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.<sup>9,10</sup> Additionally, high-quality FVs may not be accessible in economically distressed communities.<sup>11</sup> To address these issues, GusNIP (and its predecessors, the Healthy Incentives Pilot and the Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive grant program) was established by Congress to provide people participating in SNAP with incentives to purchase FVs. GusNIP is a five-year effort administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and funded through the 2018 Farm Bill. (The 2018 Farm Bill authorized the program for fiscal years 2019 through 2023 and growth in program funding from \$45 million to \$56 million for a total of \$250 million to be appropriated over five years).<sup>12</sup> Currently, there are 65 active nutrition incentive projects, including 20 recently added through GusNIP COVID Relief and Response grants, which had an additional \$69 million dollars allocated competitively to GusNIP and active FINI grantees in 2021.<sup>13</sup>

## GusNIP Environmental Context & Assumptions

GusNIP operates within a complex food system and is one of many initiatives aimed at improving nutrition and reducing food insecurity in the U.S. In developing this TOC, we took care to recognize this broader context and the community, cultural, structural, legislative, and political forces that shape the food system and influence **food security**. While GusNIP cannot control this environmental context, it influences GusNIP design, implementation, and outcomes. Illustrative elements of the environmental context are described in the adjacent call-out box. A more complete list is in Appendix D.

A TOC also identifies conditions and resources that need to be in place for program success. These “assumptions” are crucial because if they are not present, the program may not succeed, or unintended consequences may occur. Examples of GusNIP assumptions are included in the following call-out box.

### Environmental Context

The TOC identifies elements of the food system environment in which GusNIP operates, including:

- Other food system, food security, and nutrition organizations, policies, and programs co-exist and impact GusNIP outcomes and goals.
- Less healthful foods have accounted for a growing share of dietary intake among consumers. These foods are inexpensive and ubiquitous and compete with FVs, which are typically more expensive, when consumers make food choices.<sup>14</sup>
- Local/regional agricultural systems determine the types of local FVs available, the duration of local FV availability, and the affordability of local FVs in a community.
- Community characteristics such as rural versus urban location, type of **food retailer**, transportation systems, community and cultural food norms and values, and demographic characteristics vary across grantee projects and influence implementation.

### Assumptions

Assumptions of the GusNIP TOC include:

- Participants want to eat more FVs.
- Many participants find FVs expensive, creating a barrier to purchases and consumption.<sup>10</sup>
- Many participants value and want to support the local food system.<sup>15-17</sup>
- Local organizations, food stores, and farm direct retailers have capacity to implement GusNIP and want to participate in the program.

## GusNIP Nutrition Incentive Outcomes & Goals

The primary outcomes of GusNIP identified through the TOC process<sup>b</sup> are:

- Increased FV<sup>c</sup> purchases and intake among participants.<sup>18-23</sup>
- Improved food security among participants.<sup>20,24,25</sup>
- Expanded economic benefits for participants,<sup>26-28</sup> food retailers,<sup>27,29-32</sup> and farmers.<sup>26,33</sup> Incentives improve the purchasing power of participants and increase the sales of FVs at local food retailers and farmers markets.

Over time, these outcomes contribute to reaching the following ultimate goals:

- Contribute to improved community health and economic well-being and decreased health and wealth disparities.<sup>34,35</sup> Increased FV intake and food security will contribute to improved health of vulnerable community members. The economic benefits to food retailers and farmers will support the local economy. These health and economic benefits will in turn decrease health and wealth disparities.
- Sustain and expand a diverse and just local and regional food system by encouraging redemption of incentives at minority owned, local retailers that source **locally/ regionally produced FVs** from **small and medium sized farms** when available.<sup>26</sup> It should be noted that while many GusNIP nutrition incentive projects prioritize provision of locally and regionally sourced FVs, not all do so. Some locations do not have consistent access to local produce due to climate and limited growing seasons or lack of farmers and farmland in their community. Some retail food stores do not have the capacity or desire to source local FVs or may have concerns that local produce is not affordable for households with low incomes. Finally, the terms “local” and “regional” are not synonymous with small and medium sized farms in all geographical locations. For example, in California, regional farms may be large and owned by large companies yet provide FVs to nearby local retailers.

### Equity

The TOC recognizes:

- The need to increase equity in food security and in FV access, purchases, and intake as key elements of a just food system.
- Historical context of race and class, including racialized poverty, food injustice, erosion of food sovereignty, inequitable community asset ownership, disempowered communities, low wages, lack of affordable housing, and immigration fears needs careful consideration moving forward.
- The importance of promoting equity in all program goals, outcomes, and activities across race, ethnicity, culture, language, age, sexual orientation, gender, socioeconomic status, geography, and ability.
- The need for equitable decision-making processes, open communication, transparency, and clarity about fund distributions; accountability to communities served; and power-sharing between national coordinating organizations, grantees, and program participants.
- The work to center GusNIP-funded projects in equity is just beginning and projects are at different stages in their equity journeys.

<sup>b</sup>GusNIP legislation and the USDA Request for Applications identify increasing the purchase of FVs as the primary goal of GusNIP. However, both include the additional outcomes and goals identified during the TOC process as program objectives.

<sup>c</sup>GusNIP qualifying fruits and vegetables include any variety of fresh, canned, dried, or frozen whole or cut fruits and vegetables without added sugars, fats, oils, or salt as well as seeds and plants intended for cultivation and consumption and fresh herbs.

## Foundation of GusNIP

To reach these outcomes, GusNIP has established a solid foundation. National coordinating organizations play key roles in implementing the program and assuring its success. The USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) administers GusNIP and awards grants. The USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) issues program regulations such as authorization of food retailers and allowable grantee activities. The [National Training, Technical Assistance, Evaluation, and Information Center](#) (NTAE) provides training, technical assistance, and reporting and evaluation guidance to all grantees. The NTAE has convened a coalition of partners (the [Nutrition Incentive Hub](#)) and scientific advisors to provide tailored consultations, resources, and best practices for grantees. The Nutrition Incentive Hub fosters connections among nutrition incentive practitioners through several national Communities of Practice and offers multiple grantee peer-to-peer communication channels to support sharing of lessons learned and best practices. The NTAE also supports grantees with resources, data systems, and technical support for collecting participant and retailer outcome data. Additional foundation activities are described in Appendix C.

### Evaluation & Sustainability

The GusNIP program is committed to comprehensive and continuous programmatic evaluation. It supports grantees to ensure they have the capacity and resources to conduct local evaluations that assess the benefits of nutrition incentives, test different models of project implementation, and evaluate equity impacts. Aggregate and individual project evaluation data and findings are shared with grantees, communities, partners, advocates, and decision makers. Evaluation is a core function of the NTAE and contributes to implementing an effective initiative and securing continued and expanded funding to grow and diversify GusNIP.

Grantees are responsible for providing incentives to members of their community. To do this, they must build and strengthen the foundation and infrastructure of local projects. Grantees foster partnership development and communications among the communities and participants served, the local food store and farm direct retailers that participate in GusNIP projects, and the farmers who supply FVs to these food retailers. Grantees also seek to authentically engage participants in local project conception, design, implementation, and leadership.

## How GusNIP Works: Pathways

GusNIP increases the purchase and intake of FVs, improves food security, and expands economic benefits for participants, food retailers, and farmers through the following pathways, which are described in more detail in the following sections:

- Promoting FV consumption among participants and providing them with incentives so they can afford FVs.
- Supporting food store and farm direct retailers so they can accept incentives and provide participants with high quality FVs in a welcoming and accessible setting. Encouraging food store retailers to offer locally/regionally produced FVs when feasible.
- Supporting local farmers to sell FVs preferred by participants to food store retailers and at farm direct sites accepting incentives.

## Participants want FVs and participate in nutrition incentive programs

GusNIP funds the provision of incentives to participants. It supports grantees to encourage people who use SNAP to participate in GusNIP and use incentives to buy FVs, including locally/regionally produced FVs when available. To promote the project and FV purchases and consumption, grantees work with local partners to implement community-specific and culturally tailored promotion, marketing, outreach, and, in some cases, nutrition education. Grantees are empowered to design an incentive structure that meets the specific needs of their community and is feasible within funding constraints. Emerging evidence demonstrates that larger incentives for a longer time period increase FV purchases and consumption.<sup>27</sup> However, some local projects choose smaller per-household incentive amounts in order to increase the number of people benefiting from the project in their community. Additionally, what purchases earn incentives (i.e., any SNAP purchase, or only FV purchases) and the extent to which participants must match the dollar amount of incentives they use with their own SNAP funds may affect incentive redemption for participants with limited SNAP benefits. For example, if a participant earns \$1 worth of incentives for every \$1 they spend on FVs and they can earn up to \$40 worth of incentives per month, they must have \$40 of SNAP benefits to spend on FVs to secure the full incentive amount.

As we developed the TOC, participants shared how they benefit from incentives as described in the call-out box below.

### How participants benefit from nutrition incentives: quotes

*“Fruits and vegetables should never be absent in one’s household, especially with children. This program helps me buy fruits and vegetables.”*

*“[Before] I did not have a lot of money for fruits and vegetables and [my kids] would get sick... The doctor would tell me my kids are gaining weight and they need to eat more fruits, more vegetables... Now that I get help from [nutrition incentives], now I can buy fruits and vegetables.”*

*“I save my [nutrition incentives] so I can buy more [food] when I’m having a week when I am short on money.”*

*“We are supporting our local economy by shopping with [incentives] at farmers markets.”*

Participants also shared that they are more likely to use nutrition incentives when they:

- Know about the local project and understand how it works.<sup>22,37,39</sup>
- Know how and where to use and redeem incentives.<sup>38,39</sup>
- Are able to access food stores and farm direct retailers that accept incentives.<sup>39</sup>
- Are interested in purchasing and consuming FVs.
- Have the knowledge and resources to store and prepare FVs.<sup>39</sup>

Examples of GusNIP activities that support participants are described in Appendix C.

## Food store and farm direct retailers are accessible, welcoming, and provide FVs to participants

At the heart of GusNIP are the food store and farm direct retailers that offer FVs and accept incentives. Food retailers are invited and selected based on their commitment and capacity to serve the community and provide FVs – particularly local/regional FVs when available. Local GusNIP projects support food retailers by increasing their awareness and knowledge about incentives and about participants and their FV preferences. Grantees work with food retailers to identify the most appropriate form of incentive (e.g., voucher, token, automatic discount) for their retail setting. They help food retailers develop the capacity to serve participants and accept incentives. This includes developing the infrastructure needed to process incentives, such as establishing redemption procedures and understanding and securing affordable incentive technology solutions and upgrades for point-of-sale processing of incentives. Grantees also help retailers meet reporting requirements. GusNIP may build food retailer capacity to offer FVs. Some projects connect retailers to FV suppliers (including local farmers) and provide funds for signage promoting FVs. Finally, GusNIP encourages retailers to offer community-friendly retail environments that welcome participants from diverse cultures and language groups and hire staff from the community. The type and extent of support offered to food retailers varies across GusNIP grantee projects. Additional examples of activities are described in Appendix C.

These activities lead to participation by food retailers that are from the community and are accessible to participants, help retailers provide high quality FVs that are appealing to participants, promote locally/regionally produced FVs when available, and create food retail environments that feel welcoming to participants.<sup>16,24,39,40</sup>

## Local farmers supply FVs at retail food stores and farm direct sites

The farmers who sell their FVs directly to participants at farm direct sites or supply retail food stores with their FVs are also an essential component of the program. GusNIP helps farmers increase sales of their FVs by increasing the purchasing power of participants to buy FVs. Some grantees prioritize supporting farm direct locations, encourage food store retailers to provide locally/regionally produced FVs when available, and strengthen local FV distribution channels through local sourcing requirements and supporting partnerships between food retailers and local farmers. Farm direct sites often see increases in sales of FVs as well as other SNAP-eligible items because participants use their incentives to purchase FVs and their SNAP dollars to purchase other SNAP-eligible foods or beverages.<sup>26,28,30,31,33</sup> Additional examples of activities are detailed in Appendix C.

## The GusNIP Cycle: A Hypothesis

GusNIP generates mutually reinforcing actions by grantees, participants, retailers, and farmers that create positive feedback loops. GusNIP gives participants added FV purchasing power, thus increasing FV demand, purchases, and intake. Food store and farm direct retailers and farmers respond by increasing the supply and sales of FVs, which can further increase participant FV purchases and intake. Increased FV supply and demand spurs local economic development and supports local food systems, which in turn can increase FV supply. As retailers provide more quality FVs and learn how to create settings that are welcoming, culturally sensitive, and accessible, more community members shop at these locations. Collectively, these changes increase their FV purchase and intake by community members, expand community FV supply and demand, and support the local economy and food system.



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## Appendix A. Glossary

<b>Equity</b>	<p>The condition that would be achieved if one’s social status, including race, income and wealth, and place of residence no longer influenced how one fares. Inequities must be addressed at their root causes and not limited to their manifestations. Promoting equity includes the elimination of policies, practices, attitudes, and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes by social status or fail to eliminate them. Racial equity is a critical and highly salient aspect of social equity with specific root causes requiring explicit anti-racist strategies to address them.</p> <p><b>Source:</b> <a href="#">Racial Equity Tools</a></p>
<b>Farm Direct</b>	<p>Venues that provide produce directly from farms (e.g., farmers markets, farm stands, community supported agriculture (CSAs), mobile markets, etc.).</p> <p><b>Source:</b> <a href="#">Report: Year 1 GusNIP Results</a></p>
<b>Food Retailer</b>	<p>Includes both retail food store and farm direct retailers.</p>
<b>Food Security</b>	<p>Access to affordable, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food for all people at all times.</p> <p><b>Source:</b> <a href="#">2021 GusNIP Request for Proposal</a></p>
<b>Fruits and Vegetables (FVs)</b>	<p>GusNIP qualifying fruits and vegetables include any variety of fresh, canned, dried or frozen whole or cut fruits and vegetables without added sugars, fats, oils, or salt as well as seeds and plants intended for cultivation and consumption (e.g., tomato seeds or tomato plants) and fresh herbs (e.g., fresh basil, thyme, or mint).</p> <p><b>Source:</b> <a href="#">2021 GusNIP Request for Proposal</a></p>
<b>Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP or Program)</b>	<p>GusNIP is a five-year effort funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture through the 2018 Farm Bill to provide nutrition incentives for purchases of fruits and vegetables by people participating in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). (The 2018 Farm Bill authorized the program for fiscal years 2019 through 2023 and growth in program funding from \$45 million to \$56 million to be appropriated over five years).</p> <p><b>Source:</b> <a href="#">About the Nutrition Incentive Hub</a></p>
<b>GusNIP Grantee Organization (grantee)</b>	<p>Lead organization that received GusNIP funding to provide nutrition incentives.</p>
<b>GusNIP Local Partners</b>	<p>GusNIP grantees are encouraged to seek and create partnerships with public or private, non-profit or for-profit entities, including links with academic institutions (including minority-serving colleges and universities) and/or other appropriate professionals; community-based organizations; local government entities; and/or partnering entities for the purposes of providing additional resources and strengthening under-resourced communities.</p> <p><b>Source:</b> <a href="#">2021 GusNIP Request for Proposal</a></p>
<b>GusNIP National Partners</b>	<p>Includes Nutrition Incentive Hub partners, experts from academic institutions, non-governmental organizations, and trade associations.</p> <p><b>Source:</b> <a href="#">2021 GusNIP Request for Proposal</a></p>
<b>Locally/ Regionally Sourced</b>	<p>GusNIP grantees provide definitions with justification for locally and regionally sourced FVs in their grant proposals. For example, grantees may define local/ regional FVs to be FVs grown within 100 miles of the project site or within the grantee’s State. This allows for the grantee to use a definition that best meets the agricultural conditions of their community.</p> <p><b>Source:</b> <a href="#">2021 GusNIP Request for Proposal</a></p>
<b>Nutrition Incentives (incentives)</b>	<p>Nutrition incentives provide a dollar “match” amount for families participating in SNAP. For each dollar of SNAP benefits spent on FV up to a defined maximum, families get an additional dollar amount to spend on purchases of more FVs at participating food store and farm direct retailers.</p> <p><b>Source:</b> <a href="#">Report: Year 1 GusNIP Results</a></p>

## Appendix A. Glossary

<b>Participants</b>	People who participate in SNAP and nutrition incentive projects.
<b>Projects</b>	Projects administered by GusNIP grantees to provide nutrition incentives to people who participate in SNAP in their local communities.
<b>Retail Food Store</b>	Traditional food retailers serving customers at a physical location (e.g., supermarkets, supercenters, grocery stores, etc.). <b>Source:</b> <a href="#">Report: Year 1 GusNIP Results</a>
<b>Small/ Medium Farms</b>	Family-owned farms with a gross cash farm income less than \$999,999. <b>Source:</b> <a href="#">USDA Economic Research Service Farm Structure</a>

## Appendix B. GusNIP Theory of Change Development Process

The Gretchen Swanson Center for Nutrition (GSCN) contracted with Healthy Food America (HFA) to facilitate the development of a Theory of Change (TOC) for GusNIP. The TOC development process started in Fall 2020 and was completed Fall 2021. The TOC focuses on how the current program operates and was developed as follows:

- HFA reviewed GusNIP documents including the [GusNIP 2021 Request for Applications](#), the [2018 GusNIP Farm Bill statute](#), and internal NTAE documents including organizational and partner structure charts and grant reporting documents.
- HFA conducted key informant interviews with 24 GusNIP Nutrition Incentive Hub partners and grantees representing 16 different organizations and with two current GusNIP participants.
- HFA prepared an initial draft TOC based on learnings from the document review and interviews and with input from NTAE staff.
- HFA and GSCN hosted a series of three virtual partner workshops with 20-24 GusNIP partners and grantees at each session. Most attendees also had participated in the key informant interviews. The workshops aimed to ensure attendees had a common understanding of what a TOC is and engaged them in the development of the GusNIP TOC. The facilitators introduced each component of the draft GusNIP TOC (goals, outcomes, assumptions, and environmental context), and attendees discussed them and made suggestions during small and large group discussions. The final workshop session explored how an equity lens could be applied to each component of the TOC. The equity session was guided by feedback previously solicited from members of the Nutrition Incentive Hub Diversity & Equity Subcommittee and other grantees actively engaged in food justice and equity work. The workshops informed revisions to the initial draft TOC model.
- HFA conducted three focus groups (two in English, one in Spanish) with participants (N=17) from three geographically diverse project sites. The purpose of the focus groups was to understand the GusNIP experience from the participants' perspectives. Focus group data were used to ground truth the draft TOC developed from the partner interviews and workshops and identify gaps.
- HFA conducted a literature review to describe evidence supporting the TOC and its pathways. Articles were identified from a targeted PubMed search conducted by HFA as well as prior nutrition incentive literature reviews conducted by GSCN and HFA. Findings specific to the TOC were extracted.
- HFA prepared a final draft TOC (including a diagram, narrative, and table of activities) that incorporated learnings from the focus groups, evidence review, and input from GSCN staff. This final draft was shared with partners for review.

## Appendix C. Example Activities

The GusNIP program recognizes that each grantee is unique in its geography, capacities, priorities, communities, and populations served. It encourages projects to respect local culture and values and meet the specific needs of its community. Thus, the GusNIP TOC is purposively inclusive and broad. This sample of activities illustrates the range of actions being implemented by grantees. It is not meant to be a comprehensive list and not all projects are implementing each activity. GusNIP is centered in equity, and grantees seek to implement activities with an equity lens that promotes culturally and linguistically appropriate approaches that recognize the historical contexts, traditions, preferences, and knowledge of the diverse communities served.

### GusNIP supports participants

#### GusNIP Grantee Organizations:

Collaborate with community-based organizations, food store and farm direct retailers, and participants to issue and promote incentives, provide information on how to use them, and to promote FVs and local FV purchases and intake:<sup>24,38,41,42</sup>

- Promote (e.g., events, signage, tours) incentives at retail food stores (e.g., grocery) and farm direct (e.g., farmers markets) sites<sup>24,43,44</sup>
- Provide incentive information through Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) communications (e.g., website, mailers) and enrollment
- Use peer-to-peer outreach strategies (e.g., participants promote incentives within their social networks, community health workers)<sup>45</sup>
- Implement community marketing campaigns (e.g., events, social media, flyers)<sup>42</sup>
- Co-locate additional federal food assistance programs (e.g., the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and children (WIC), the Senior Farmers Market Program) at food retailers to drive participant visits
- Incorporate incentive projects into local nutrition education programs (e.g., Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education, SNAP-Ed)
- Promote locally sourced FVs when grantees offer this option
- Offer FV recipes, cooking classes and demonstrations, taste testing opportunities, and other nutrition education activities<sup>19,23,43,46-48</sup>
- Distribute FV recipes and tips for preparation and storage (e.g., via websites and social media) at food retailers
- Collaborate with community organizations to provide transportation to food retailers

#### Food Retailers:

- Obtain project supplies, equipment, and technology
- Hire staff who are part of the community and speak the language(s) of the community
- Train staff on project implementation, including how to promote and explain nutrition incentives to participants and how to process incentives
- Provide translation services as needed
- Implement community-specific strategies (e.g., provide extended hours of operation, mobile markets, community supported agriculture (CSAs), online ordering and delivery) to improve food retailer access to participants<sup>15,37,38,49</sup>

### GusNIP supports participation of food store and farm direct retailers in the program

#### GusNIP Grantee Organizations:

- Recruit diverse types of food retailers (e.g., convenience stores, supermarkets, farmers markets, mobile markets) that meet local community needs
- Increase consumer demand for FVs produced by small and medium sized farms
- On-board food retailers (e.g., help them secure SNAP authorization through USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) and establish program memorandums of understanding between food retailers and grantees, vendor agreements, and other required paperwork)

- Conduct assessment of current food retailer capacity to process and provide incentives
- Provide technical assistance, training, and support to food retailers to build capacity for implementation, including selection of type of incentive (e.g., voucher, token, electronic); obtaining needed supplies, equipment, and technology (electronic benefits transfer (EBT) and point of sale (POS) systems – funding may be provided); meeting reporting requirements; improving site accessibility (e.g., hours of operation, online ordering); and creating welcoming and culturally appropriate environments (e.g., materials and signage translation, food preferences and culture of participants, serving diverse clients)<sup>24</sup>
- Provide technical assistance and training to explain local/regional sourcing including its benefits to retail food stores
- Build relationships between retail food store partners, farm direct partners, distributors, and farmers to promote local sourcing
- Develop outreach and marketing materials to promote food retailers participating in GusNIP

#### **The NTAE and Nutrition Incentive Hub Partners:**

- Provide guidance to food store retailers on incentive processing technology solutions that can be incorporated into their existing POS devices
- Work with POS developers to further the development of additional incentive processing technology solutions
- Provide technical assistance and support to grantees so they can help local retailers source FVs/local FVs – including processes for working with FV distributors, vendors, and farmers<sup>24,41</sup>

### **Local farmers supply FVs to retail food stores and at farm direct retailers**

#### **GusNIP Grantee Organizations:**

- Promote farm direct programs to local farmers
- Support local farmers selling products to retail food stores

#### **NTAE and Nutrition Incentive Hub Partners:**

- Provide technical assistance to local farmers as requested

### **Grantees and national partners build the foundation of GusNIP**

#### **GusNIP Grantee Organizations:**

- Write GusNIP grant application and manage project implementation post-award including administering incentives
- Host forums and other opportunities to dialogue with and learn from the community
- Conduct evaluation activities to understand community-specific norms and barriers to FV consumption
- Engage community in project planning, design, and implementation (e.g., community meetings, workshops, interviews)
- Hire community members as part of the local project implementation team
- Establish partnerships and networks that include local and state governments, funders, community organizations, food retailers, farmers, participants, and community leaders<sup>31</sup>
- Work with the NTAE's Research & Evaluation and Technical Assistance & Innovation teams to acquire necessary training, technical assistance, and reporting and evaluation guidance to implement grant and work with partners, including food store and farm direct retailers

#### **NTAE and Nutrition Incentive Hub Partners:**

- Provide technical assistance and support to grantees for partnership development and communications; strategic planning; fundraising; and project design, promotion, and implementation through website, newsletter, webinars, meetings, and one-to-one consultation
- Build communities of practice to facilitate peer-to-peer sharing of knowledge and best practices about project implementation
- Provide resources, data systems, and technical support for collecting participant- and retailer-level outcome data
- Conduct research to understand the aggregate impact of nutrition incentives on outcomes
- Establish a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) committee to guide implementation of equity-centered structures and processes across the GusNIP program
- Provide DEI trainings for local projects<sup>50</sup>

## Appendix D. Environmental Context

GusNIP operates in the context of a complex food system, and it is one of many initiatives aimed at improving nutrition and reducing food insecurity. In developing a TOC, it is important to recognize the broader context and the community, cultural, structural, legislative, commercial, and political forces that shape the food system and influence food security. While the environmental context is not under the control of GusNIP, it influences its design, implementation, and outcomes. GusNIP partners and grantees identified the following elements of the food system that shape the environment in which GusNIP operates:

- Other food system, food security, and nutrition organizations (e.g., food banks); policies (e.g., [Good Food Practices and Policies](#)) and programs (e.g., [The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children](#)) that co-exist and impact GusNIP outcomes and goals.
- GusNIP operates within the context of SNAP, and SNAP does not meet the needs of all community members facing food insecurity. SNAP enrollment is limited to U.S. citizens and certain lawfully present non-citizens who meet income and resource eligibility criteria. Some potential participants may feel hesitant to enroll in SNAP due to associated stigma or concerns about immigration status.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, SNAP benefits are not sufficient to meet the food needs of all beneficiaries, and not all eligible participants are reached through current outreach strategies.
- GusNIP funding (currently \$250 million over five years) is insufficient to provide incentives to all eligible SNAP participants.
- COVID-19 exacerbated food insecurity, reduced food access, limited availability of nutrition education, and compromised other GusNIP program components such as outreach and recruitment.
- Increasingly, over the last several years, less healthful foods have accounted for a growing share of dietary intake. These less healthful foods are inexpensive, ubiquitous, and compete with FVs, which are typically more expensive, when consumers make food choices.
- Local/regional food systems determine the types of local FVs available, the duration of local FV availability, and the affordability of local FVs. Conditions that affect local agriculture include land and water access, food processing and distribution systems, food system workforces, zoning, farming economics and policies, and weather.
- Community characteristics such as rural versus urban location, type of food retailer, transportation systems, community and cultural food norms and values, and demographics vary across grantee projects and influence implementation.

## Appendix E. Assumptions

A TOC identifies conditions and resources that need to be in place for program success. These “assumptions” are crucial because if they are not present, the program may not succeed, or it may lead to unintended consequences. GusNIP partners, grantees, and participants identified the following assumptions of the GusNIP TOC:

- Participants want to eat more FVs.
- Many participants find FVs expensive, creating a barrier to purchases and consumption.<sup>10</sup>
- Many participants value and want to support the local food system.<sup>15-17</sup>
- Local organizations with the capacity to implement GusNIP projects exist and participate.
- Food store and farm direct retailers want to participate in the program and are, or are willing to become, authorized SNAP retailers.
- In some communities, farmers are available to produce FVs desired by participants and farm-to-food-retailer distribution channels are available.



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