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SB-18 Food Desert Elimination Grant Program. (2025-2026)

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Date Published: 05/08/2025 09:00 PM

AMENDED IN SENATE MAY 08, 2025

AMENDED IN SENATE MAY 05, 2025

AMENDED IN SENATE MARCH 03, 2025

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE— 2025–2026 REGULAR SESSION

SENATE BILL

NO. 18

Introduced by Senator Rubio

(Principal coauthor: Assembly Member Jeff Gonzalez)

(Coauthor: Senator Ashby)

(Coauthors: Assembly Members Hadwick and Rogers)

December 02, 2024

An act to add and repeal Chapter 15 (commencing with Section 49030) of Division 17 of the Food and Agricultural Code, relating to ~~food, and making an appropriation therefor.~~ *food.*

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SB 18, as amended, Rubio. Food Desert Elimination Grant Program.

Existing law creates the Office of Farm to Fork within the Department of Food and Agriculture, and requires the office, to the extent that resources are available, to work with various entities, as prescribed, to increase the amount of agricultural products available to underserved communities and schools in the state. Existing law requires the office, among other things, to identify distribution barriers that affect limited food access and work to overcome those barriers through various actions and to coordinate with school districts and representatives to increase the nutritional profile of foods provided in schools.

This bill would create the Food Desert Elimination Grant Program under the administration of the department for the purpose of expanding access to healthy foods in food deserts, as defined, in the state, and areas at risk of becoming food deserts, by providing grants to grocery store operators, as specified. The bill would create the Food Desert Elimination Fund in the General Fund and would authorize the fund to be expended by the department, upon appropriation by the Legislature, for purposes of the program. The bill would authorize the department to collect nonstate, federal, and private funds, require those funds to be deposited into the California Equitable Food Access Account within the Food Desert Elimination Fund, and continuously appropriate moneys in the account to the department for purposes of the ~~program, thereby making an appropriation.~~ *program.* The bill would authorize the department to award grants for specified purposes to grocery store operators seeking to locate

grocery stores in food ~~deserts~~ *deserts or to existing grocery stores located in food deserts*. The bill would authorize the department to adopt guidelines to implement these provisions. The bill would make the implementation of ~~these~~ *all of its* provisions contingent upon an appropriation by the Legislature. The bill would repeal ~~these~~ *its* provisions on December 31, 2030.
Vote: majority Appropriation: ~~yes~~ *no* Fiscal Committee: yes Local Program: no

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

SECTION 1. This act shall be known, and may be cited, as the Food Affordability Act.

SEC. 2. Chapter 15 (commencing with Section 49030) is added to Division 17 of the Food and Agricultural Code, to read:

CHAPTER 15. Food Deserts

Article 1. General Provisions

49030. Unless the context otherwise requires, the definitions in this article govern the construction of this chapter.

49031. "Department" means the Department of Food and Agriculture.

49032. "Food desert" means a food desert as determined by the Economic Research Service within the United States Department of Agriculture.

49033. "Grocery store" means a retail store in this state of over 15,000 square feet that is a retail seller of groceries, as described in Code 445110 of the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) published by the United States Office of Management and Budget, 2022 edition.

49033.5. "Program" means the Food Desert Elimination Grant Program created pursuant to Section 49040.

49034. "Small-scale grocery store" means a retail store in this state of under 15,000 square feet that is a retail seller of groceries, as described in Code 445110 of the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) published by the United States Office of Management and Budget, 2022 edition.

Article 2. Food Desert Elimination Grant Program

49040. (a) The Food Desert Elimination Grant Program is hereby created under the administration of the department for the purpose of expanding access to healthy foods in food deserts in the state, and areas at risk of becoming food deserts, by providing grants to grocery store operators.

(b) (1) The Food Desert Elimination Fund is hereby created in the General Fund and may be expended by the department, upon appropriation by the Legislature, for purposes of this article.

(2) The department may collect nonstate, federal, and private funds for purposes of this article, and those funds shall be deposited into the California Equitable Food Access Account, which is hereby created within the Food Desert Elimination Fund. Notwithstanding Section 13340 of the Government Code, moneys in the account shall be continuously appropriated without regard to fiscal years to the department for purposes of this article.

49041. The department may award a grant for one or more of the following purposes to a grocery store operator seeking to locate a grocery store in a food ~~desert~~ *desert or to an existing grocery store located in a food desert*:

(a) A market and site feasibility study.

(b) Salaries and benefits to grocery store employees.

(c) Rents or downpayments to acquire a facility located in a food desert.

(d) Capital improvements, planning, renovations, land acquisition, demolition, and durable and nondurable equipment purchases.

(e) Other costs determined eligible by the department, including costs specified in federal funding program requirements.

49042. The department may, in its discretion, award a grant described in Section 49041 to a small-scale grocery store.

49043. The department may use up to 10 percent of total program funding for technical assistance.

49044. On or before January 1, 2028, the department shall report the number of grants awarded under the program and the location of grant recipients to the relevant policy committees of the Legislature, in compliance with Section 9795 of the Government Code.

49045. The department may adopt guidelines to implement this article.

49046. The implementation of this article is contingent upon an appropriation for its purposes by the Legislature in the annual Budget Act or another act.

49047. This chapter shall remain in effect only until December 31, 2030, and as of that date is repealed.