

New York State Council on Hunger and Food Policy 2023 Report



**Agriculture
and Markets**

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I. History and Overview of the Council

In the 2016 State of the State, the New York State Council on Hunger and Food Policy (the Council) was created, merging together two previously existing groups: the Food Policy Council and the New York State Anti-Hunger Task Force. In November 2022, the Council and its mission were codified in statute when Governor Kathy Hochul signed S.5490-B/A.3854-B. Chaired by the Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture and Markets, the stated purpose of the Council is to develop comprehensive, coordinated state food policies to ensure that all citizens of New York State can eat a healthy diet and avoid food insecurity while consuming New York-grown and produced foods as much as possible.

On March 3, 2023, Governor Hochul signed Assembly Bill A.615, updating the Council's priorities and make-up of the Council membership. The Council meets at least twice a year and publishes a report annually outlining its activities, recommended food policies, the process made towards achieving its goals, and action items that are necessary to implement recommendations. The Council is currently chaired by Commissioner of Agriculture Richard A. Ball.

The Council works to develop and recommend policies and plans to:

- ensure the availability of and expand access to an adequate supply of affordable, fresh, and nutritious food;
- expand agricultural production and processing;
- help local farm and food businesses to succeed and grow, especially beginning and new owners and those that are members of historically underrepresented or marginalized groups;
- reduce barriers affecting food-insecure populations in rural and urban spaces;
- facilitate the building of infrastructure, including, but not limited to, aggregation, processing, storage, packaging, distribution, and marketing facilities;
- support and expand programs that recruit, train, and provide technical assistance to New York farmers, food producers, food processors, and residents;
- coordinate interagency programs, initiatives, and procedures promoting local farm and food products in New York communities;
- eliminate statutory and legal barriers hindering the development of a local farm and food economy;
- facilitate the use of public lands to grow local farms or food products;
- initiate and facilitate public awareness campaigns about the economic benefits of a local farm and food economy;

- improve access to nutrition assistance programs and transportation options, enhance infrastructure, and decrease socio-economic disparities;
- alleviate geographic and economic barriers to improve access to healthy fresh food;
- eliminate barriers impacting a consumer's ability to purchase healthy food; and
- encourage state agencies and community partners to share ideas for reducing food-related chronic disease and promoting well-balanced child nutrition.

To best achieve the above goals, the Council is broken down into four work groups specializing in:

1. economic vitality and institutional purchasing of local agriculture,
2. improving nutrition and promoting food as medicine,
3. strengthening food assistance networks, and
4. expanding food access.

Each work group has been tasked with a set of priorities (Figure 1). This structure enables subject matter experts to dive deeper into their workgroup topic to address the goals of the statute, coming together in synergy and collaboration during the Council meetings to identify and prioritize the following recommendations.

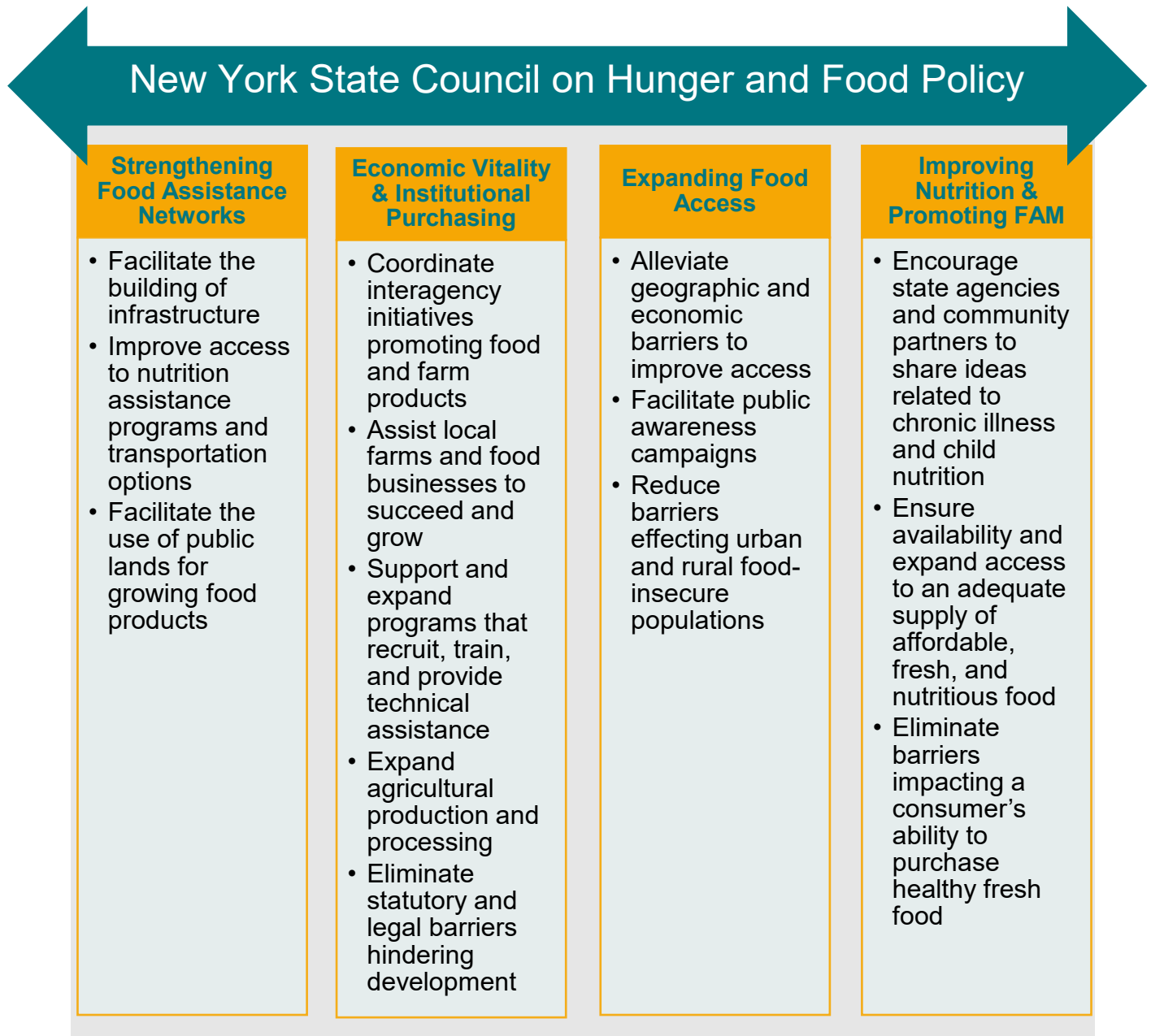


Figure 1. Council on Hunger and Food Policy Work Group Structure and Priorities

II. Council on Hunger and Food Policy Members and Affiliates

The Council is comprised of select representatives from across multiple sectors of the New York State agri-food value chain, including food charities, mid-sized farmers, State agencies, and a growing number of anti-hunger advocacy-focused groups. The participants are driven by a desire to pursue greater diversity in the anti-hunger space, both in terms of food system sectors and in terms of the cultural/racial backgrounds of its

key players. Moving forward, the work groups aspire to embed their work more deeply in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and to lean on the DEI knowledge of the Council's members. The current members and affiliates of the Council are:

- Commissioner Richard Ball, New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets*
- Kathleen DeCataldo, on behalf of Commissioner Betty A. Rosa, New York State Education Department*
- Jill Dunkel, on behalf of Commissioner James McDonald, New York State Department of Health*
- Greg Olsen, New York State Office for the Aging*
- Allison Stark, on behalf of Commissioner Hope Knight, Empire State Development*
- Susan Zimet, on behalf of Acting Commissioner Barbara C. Guinn, New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance*
- Judiann Carmack-Fayyaz, Stony Brook University Food Lab, appointed on the recommendation of the Assembly Speaker*
- Karen Erren, Feeding Westchester, appointed on the recommendation of the Senate President*
- Justin Rogers, Cornell Cooperative Extension, appointed on the recommendation of the Senate Minority*
- Open Seat to represent Agriculture, Nutrition or Food Policy, to be appointed on the recommendation of the Assembly Minority*
- Joel Berg, Hunger Free America*
- Jeff Crist, Crist Brothers Orchards*
- Mitch Gruber, Foodlink*
- Leslie Gordon, Food Bank for NYC*
- Sue Jaffe, Snowdance Farms*
- Jerome Nathaniel, City Harvest*
- Stephen O'Brien, New York City Public Schools, Office of Food and Nutrition Services*
- Natasha Pernicka, The Food Pantries for the Capital District/The Alliance for a Hunger-Free New York*
- Dr. Melony Samuels, The Campaign Against Hunger*
- Julie Suarez, Cornell University*
- Renée St. Jacques, New York Farm Bureau*
- Steve Terzo, American Dairy Association and Dairy Council*
- Marcel Van Ooyen, Grow NYC*
- Andres Vives, Hunger Solutions New York*

- Ellie Wilson, Price Chopper Supermarkets*
- Nicholas Barber, New York State Office of General Services
- Natalie Birch-Higgins, New York State Department of State, Office for New Americans
- Dana Cohen, New York State Office of Mental Health
- Kristine Ellsworth, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
- Commissioner Suzanne Miles-Gustave, New York State Office of Children and Family Services
- Nichole Borchard, Field and Fork Network
- Mark Bordeau, Food Bank of the Southern Tier
- Allison DeHoney, Buffalo Go Green
- Tessa Edick, FarmOn! Foundation
- Dan Egan, Feeding New York State
- Kathleen Finlay, Glynwood Center for Regional Food and Farming
- David Greenfield, Met Council
- Laura Gonzalez-Murphy, New York State Department of State, Office for New Americans
- Camesha Grant, Food Bank for NYC
- Krista Hesdorfer, Hunger Solutions New York
- Caitlin Lazarski, New York School Nutrition Association
- Dr. Tashara Leak, Cornell University
- Julia McCarthy, New York State Health Foundation
- Kristen McManus, American Association of Retired Persons
- Dr. Angela Odoms Young, Cornell University
- Merrill Rotter, New York State Office of Mental Health
- Rachel Sabella, No Kid Hungry New York
- Randi Shubin Dresner, Island Harvest Food Bank
- Bronwyn Starr, New York State Health Foundation
- Larry Tse, National Young Farmers Coalition & Choy Commons
- Gabrielle Viens, New York State Office of General Services
- Karen Washington, Rise & Root Farm

*This member serves in a formal capacity per the requirements of Section 16 of Agriculture and Markets Law.

III. Executive Summary

Addressing hunger and food insecurity while maintaining the economic viability of the agricultural industry is a priority for New York State. During their 2023 sessions, Council members discussed how to mitigate barriers faced within New York's agri-food value chain as well as broader systematic and economic disparities, including real-world examples of challenges faced by New York State residents. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Economic Research Service (ERS), in the years 2020-2023, an average of 12.4% of New York State residents lived in poverty.¹ A recent study conducted by the New York State Department of Health approximates that one in four adults (24.9%) in New York State experience food insecurity, while the per county levels of food insecurity range from 11.2% to 39.0% (Figure 2).² Furthermore, food-secure Americans spent \$13 per week, per person, more than food-insecure Americans.³ This translates to food-insecure New Yorkers spending about \$1.5 billion less on food each year than food-secure New Yorkers. These staggering numbers not only demonstrate the role of poverty in the current hunger crisis, but also highlight the opportunity for low-income New Yorkers' purchasing power to be boosted through food safety net programs and extra dollars that could support New York's agriculture industry.

New York's agricultural industry is uniquely diverse, and many commodities are ranked in the top ten nationally, including milk, apples, cabbage, snap beans, squash, maple, and onions.⁴ However, the agricultural industry is not without its challenges as farmers face fluctuating commodity prices, development pressure, labor availability, and adequate processing capacity. The Council provides an opportunity to connect farmers with stakeholders to address these challenges, as well as to discuss how to facilitate the movement of food to consumers. In addition, there are opportunities to make connections with efforts to increase food production in urban areas through urban agriculture and community gardens that can strengthen local food systems.

The work groups' discussions and recommendations below continue the conversation to address the multitude of factors and issues as part of the New York food system.

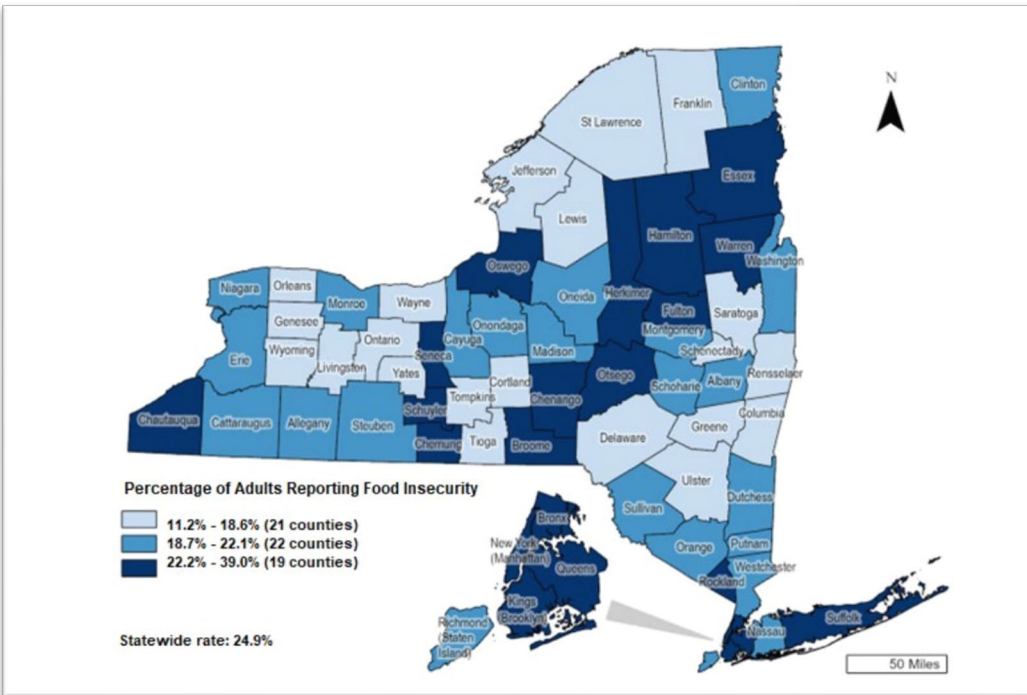


Figure 2. Self-Reported Food Insecurity Among New York State Adults by County⁵

IV. Council Activities and Resulting Recommendations

In 2023, the Council convened on August 22 and October 19 at multiple publicly accessible locations. The meeting agendas included time to hear recommendations and updates from each of the four work groups and provide critical input into the creation of this report and the recommendations it contains. The meetings provided an opportunity to reflect on the past few years, speak to current challenges in our food system, and identify the next steps.

At the first meeting, the Council discussed areas of opportunity, identifying the need for comprehensive resource mapping to better assess assets in the field, and targeted solutions to increase the resiliency of New York's agri-food value chain. In the second meeting, the Council discussed the recommendations put forth by each of the work groups to identify additional solutions that increase the resiliency of New York's agri-food value chain, as detailed in the sections below. The full meeting agendas and discussions can be viewed at agriculture.ny.gov/council-hunger-and-food-policy. To ensure equal opportunity for input on the resulting recommendations, additional feedback was collected via a survey sent to members and affiliates asking them to rank the recommendations in each work group. These survey results were utilized to rank the recommendations listed under each work group from highest to lowest priority.

A. Economic Vitality and Institutional Purchasing of Local Agriculture Work Group

Food policy stakeholders may have a knowledge gap regarding agricultural supply chains and their environmental, economic, and social determinants. To assist public policy decision making, it is helpful to gather feedback from a diverse, farmer-centered stakeholder group that focuses on maximizing local food purchasing and economic opportunity to ensure a vibrant and healthy food system.

The Economic Vitality and Institutional Purchasing of Local Agriculture work group convened several times in 2023 to identify key cost drivers and profitability challenges for farm and food businesses in New York State. To visualize these key drivers for economic vitality, this workgroup created a process map (Figure 3) showing focus areas including regulatory barriers, cost of business operations, the need to improve in-state processing opportunities, and ensuring workforce availability as critical barriers to the economic vitality of farm and food businesses in New York State. When examining this process map, it is important to keep in mind that this is a broad overview of key external inputs within the value chain from farms to institutional buyers and does not reflect economies for individual farms. Anecdotally, farmers frequently reference a higher cost of doing business in New York State, but there is currently no comparative data set that outlines these costs in contrast to other states or countries. Consequently, this work group communicated the need to use research dollars for pilot studies that quantify these burdens, which can more accurately inform law making and regulatory decisions.

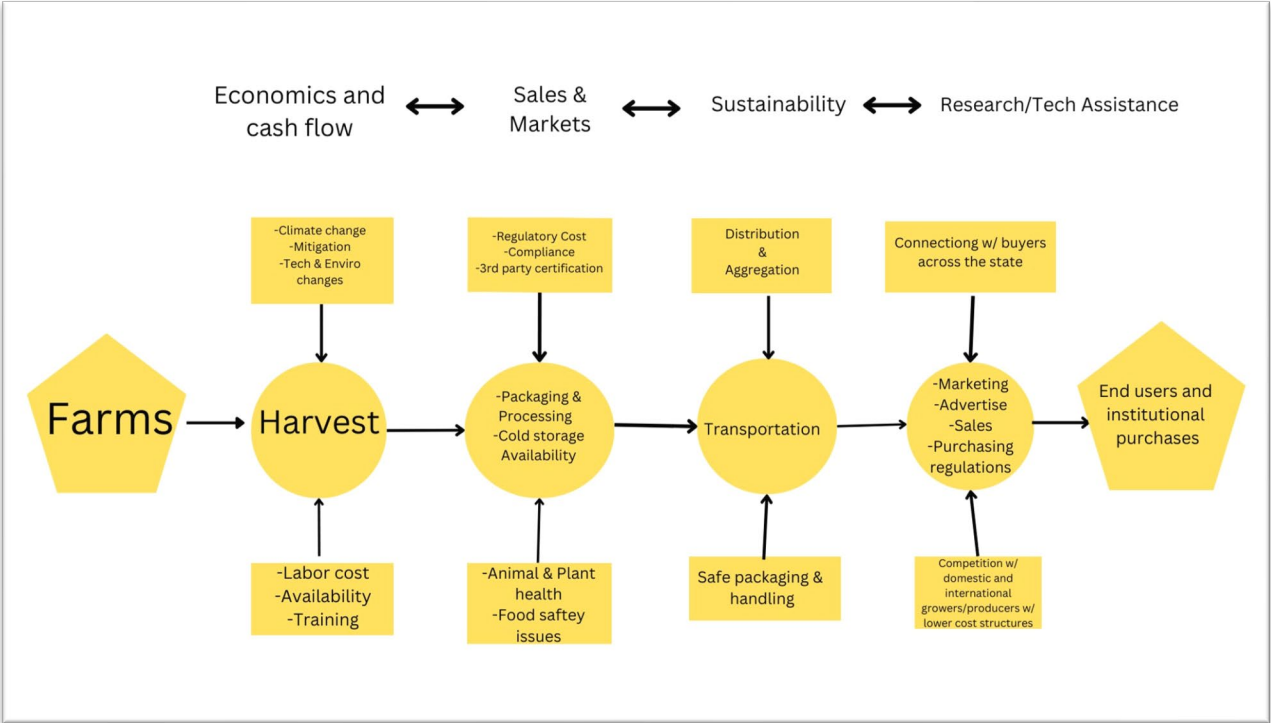


Figure 3. Farm Viability Factors Process Map

The work group used the dairy industry as a case study to evaluate the impact and costs of doing business in New York State and increasing institutional purchasing. For example, revamping the fluid milk supply chain is a challenge because modernizing fluid milk processing plants in New York would require significant financial investment. Members indicated high waste associated with milk in schools due to factors such as lack of refrigeration and student preferences. Members indicated the benefits of increasing the use of shelf-stable milk because it reduces the ‘last mile’ procurement needs and mitigates waste.

While significant investments have been made by the private sector, supported by Governor Hochul’s efforts to utilize various Empire State Development programs for tax incentives and facility modernization and revitalization, there has not yet been large-scale investment in shelf-stable milk by New York dairy processors to fill this gap. In addition, workgroup members mentioned that there hasn’t been the same level of state investment in processing fruits and vegetables. This is due to historic efforts to consolidate manufacturing facilities to reduce redundancy and increase efficiency, which comes at the cost of resiliency and agility. While more research is needed to quantify this impact, members strongly indicated a need for smaller-scale product innovation and more local processing.

Nourish New York, created to address market disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic, helps New York emergency food providers to purchase products from New York farmers, suppliers, and processors to distribute to communities in need. The 2023-2024 State Budget allocated \$50 million for Nourish New York, which has been allocated to food assistance networks across the state. In addition, the Department of Agriculture and Markets is administering the Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program (LFPA), with funding from USDA, which aims to improve food and agricultural supply chain resiliency in New York State. The program, named New York Food for New York Families, aims to support local and traditionally disadvantaged farmers by building economic opportunities and creating new marketing opportunities.⁶ At the same time, it improves food access for underserved communities by tailoring distribution to address local food challenges. Both LFPA and Nourish New York aim to facilitate the movement of New York food products to those in need.

The work group also discussed opportunities to increase food recovery including useable food that remains in farm fields and could be gleaned for distribution. Many successful gleaning networks across the state coordinate volunteers to harvest and then distribute remaining produce, such as an Orange County program that harvests crops not being sold and delivers it to the Hudson Valley Food Bank and local food pantries, soup kitchens, and community organizations.⁷ The key is connecting farmers with volunteer networks that can work with food assistance networks for gleaning and distribution. While Nourish New York is highly successful in facilitating the distribution of harvested food, useable food remains in farm fields, representing an additional opportunity to increase food recovery.

To support farmers at the individual farm level, New York State has adopted a variety of tax and investment policies over the last several decades that have been intended to assist the farm community in addressing New York's higher cost of doing business. However, little hard data exists to quantify whether these programs are still working to support the farm community. For example, in 2017, New York State enacted a tax credit that provides farmers with a credit of 25% of the fair market value of qualified food donations made to any eligible New York food pantry operating in New York, not to exceed \$5,000 per tax year.⁸ However, farmers have indicated that the \$5,000 does not cover enough of the costs associated with harvesting, processing, packing, and delivering items to qualified food banks. Governor Hochul's recent increase in the investment tax credit to a refundable credit will assist farms with farm expansion, while the adoption of the overtime tax credit is thought to help ameliorate some of New York's comparatively higher labor costs. Since many of New York's farmers compete at globally set commodity price levels, finding ways to encourage innovation and economic efficiency through smart policy development is critically important. Examining ways to strengthen networks that

address farm-based food recovery such as technical assistance, more regional processing opportunities, information on legal liability protections, and using the New York State Commission on National and Community Service to recruit volunteers for gleaning activities, would help offset the costs associated with labor, processing, and transportation.

Early in 2023, the work group also spent significant time discussing ways to increase local foods procurement, both dairy and specialty crops in institutional markets. Members of the subcommittee developed a series of recommendations, sent to Commissioner Ball, on how to thoughtfully consider the development of economic incentives for local foods purchasing. Governor Hochul's recent Executive Order 32 sets a goal for state agencies to purchase 30% of foods from local, New York-grown sources including smaller-scale and underrepresented farmers. Cornell University's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences has three current initiatives designed to assist farmers in more successful bids into the state procurement strategy: 1) a Farm-to-School extension coordinator program, focused on assisting school districts throughout the state in meeting the 30% NYS Initiative threshold; 2) a focused effort in training Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprises (MWBE) farmer businesses to utilize and gain relevant certifications for procurement purposes; and 3) a 'true cost of food' calculator tool that will be field tested in the coming year, which will enable procurement purchasers to more readily assess the economic benefit to purchasing local from a variety of factors including transportation, economic impact of local foods purchase, and sustainability factors.

Recommended Food Policies and Actions For New York State

To address the barriers and opportunities shared above, the Economic Vitality and Institutional Purchasing of Local Agriculture work group recommends that New York State take the following actions.

1. Investigate ways to incentivize farmers to participate in institutional food procurement that would reduce barriers in cost, paperwork, and aggregation.
 - a. Utilize Cornell's "true cost of food" calculator and New York food procurement systems to support the implementation of procurement goals outlined in Executive Order 32.
 - b. Require the Departments of Health and Agriculture and Markets' food safety staff to report on barriers to food recovery/donation to assess and mitigate liability barriers to food donation.
 - c. Continue to address aggregation, storage, and transportation costs through available funding streams and by encouraging collaboration with the

Procurement Advisory Council and Strategic Interagency Task Force Lessening Obstacles to Agriculture (SILO) Working Group.

- d. Explore other non-traditional food donation pathways.
 - e. Examine ways to increase food-gleaning networks and opportunities.
2. Develop a “NY Loves Food Manufacturing” campaign, highlighting Empire State Development incentives to attract additional food manufacturing and fresh packing at all levels of production, including New York’s environmental assets like water availability and farm production, which make it increasingly conducive to minimally and manufactured food products; and the existing and potential incentives for added value manufacturing and fresh packing (e.g., on-farm, medium, and larger scale processing ventures).
 - a. Additionally, the campaign can explore whether additional incentive structures would be effective in continuing New York’s recent gains in attracting food processors.
 - b. The campaign can also invest in research and development for science-based solutions necessary to improve farmer profitability, particularly in a changing climate (i.e., plant breeding, innovation in agriculture, climate-forward solutions, etc.).
 3. Study the comparative advantage of New York State food production as it relates to the cost of production within the state and surrounding key competition in other states. Use this information to assess existing and potential New York State farm and food incentives across key agriculture production sectors and recommend next steps. To study this issue further, the work group recommends that the State explores the resources and capacity of partner organizations and agencies.
 4. Collaborate with Homes and Community Renewal (HCR) to assess the New York State Farmworker Housing Low-Interest Loan Fund, including working with Farm Credit East (FCE) regarding forecasting their need for funds to support improvements, expansions, and new construction of farmworker housing. Evaluate if there are ways to improve fund delivery to FCE to strengthen the program.
 5. Reconvene the SILO Working Group and share recommendations with State Legislature.

B. Improving Nutrition and Promoting Food as Medicine Work Group

Several factors impact a consumer’s ability to purchase healthy food and their desire to consume it. When this ability and desire are hindered for a consumer, there may be negative short- and long-term consequences for their mental and physical health. There is a need for state agencies and community partners to share ideas for reducing food-related chronic diseases and promoting well-balanced child nutrition. “Food as Medicine”

interventions are a spectrum of programs and services that respond to this critical link between nutrition and diet-related health issues. Food as Medicine (FAM) initiatives increase equity through interventions that include the provision of food assistance, such as produce vouchers and healthy food boxes, improving nutrition education and food literacy, and combining food access with clinical nutrition treatment, such as medical groceries and medically tailored meals.

The Improving Nutrition and Promoting Food as Medicine work group began identifying ways to close gaps in this space by building out the FAM intervention model (Figure 4). Due to the specificity required for medically tailored groceries and formal FAM interventions, it is important to identify what supply chains are best suited for each program's unique needs. Many current FAM assets could be connected to existing supply chains of New York products, such as Taste NY vendors and NYS Grown & Certified producers, to supply local food as part of a produce prescription and medically tailored foods.

Another focus area identified by the work group is dedicated bridge funding for food assistance organizations waiting for guidance and a timeline for the Section 1115 Medicaid demonstration waiver (1115 waiver). Section 1115 demonstration waivers require federal approval and allow states to pilot non-traditional service coverage, payment models, and eligibility criteria in their Medicaid programs to address health disparities.^{9, 10} The proposed bridge funding should be consistent with the current community-based organization (CBO) infrastructure, while building out a regional food system. Social care networks determine vendors and often cut CBOs out, despite their critical work to ensure equity goals are met.

Additional partners such as the Food Bank of NYC's "Food as Health" work group are working with healthcare providers to identify funding for CBOs. CBO FAM programs struggle with capacity and a consistent supply chain of healthy, desirable staples, leaving a potential gap between what food banks can offer and what is eligible for FAM interventions. Infrastructure needs for CBOs identified include facilities (for storage of food and preparation of food, classrooms/teaching kitchens/on-site commercial kitchens, and space for shelf-stable food storage, including capital funding to add space or renovations), utilities, transportation, delivery vehicles, equipment, industrial refrigeration/freezers, kitchen equipment, non-food items (e.g., bags, packaging, cooking products), technology (e.g., referral, client management, billing, and security software, inventory management system, IT, payroll, HIPAA compliant scheduling), and communication channels (e.g., encrypted emails, Teams, Slack, fax).

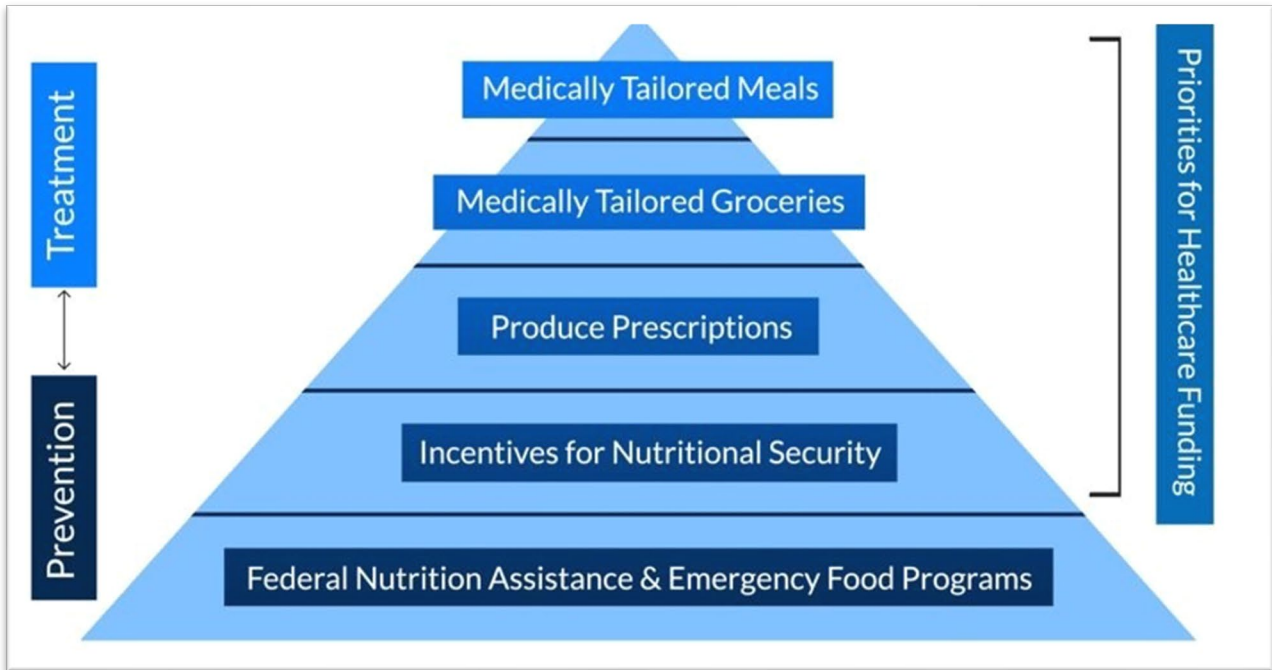


Figure 4. New York State Food as Medicine Pyramid¹¹

Recommended Food Policies and Actions For New York State

1. Encourage CBOs to participate in Food as Medicine Programming by:
 - a. encouraging state agencies to engage with CBO models to strengthen their connections with local producers,
 - b. providing bridge funding to ensure programming remains operational while CBOs become providers through social care networks upon approval of the 1115 Waiver, and
 - c. developing an outreach campaign highlighting the importance of local procurement and New York products that can be integrated into food access supply chains. Focus on culturally appropriate supply chain needs for Kosher, Halal, etc.
2. Create an asset map across New York agriculture production systems and FAM programming to break down silos, provide preventative education across agencies, and increase nutrition security and FAM infrastructure. Replicate and expand FAM infrastructure contributing to a robust, holistic, state-centric vision.
3. Study nutrition labeling for specialty crops in New York State to ensure culturally appropriate specialty commodity crops have accurate nutrient profiles. Combine this data with existing FAM and NYS Grown & Certified guidelines to create a resource that New York State farm and food businesses can use to understand what nutritional milestones need to be reached reach by minimally processed,

processed, and/or prepared foods so that they qualify for intuitional purchasing pipelines (i.e., lowering sodium levels, packaging type, or uniformity of produce sizes).

C. Strengthening Food Assistance Networks Work Group

There is consistent demand for fresh, nutritious foods in the emergency food network. Because these foods are often highly perishable, there is a need for increased logistical innovation and coordination among partners to bring these foods to the communities that need them most in a timely fashion. The facilitation of access to locally grown, fresh, and minimally processed food within emergency food supply chains has the potential to alleviate numerous nutritional barriers to those communities and families that rely on the emergency food network, while simultaneously providing an additional market for New York State producers. The year 2022 saw the highest service levels ever in the Capital Region food pantry system and 2023's need was even higher across the state, following an 87 percent increase in the number of households that didn't have enough to eat over one week.¹²

To broadly identify assets and gaps within the food assistance network and emergency feeding system at the federal, state, and private levels, the Strengthening Food Assistance Networks work group first built out a process map (see Figure 5). During the creation and analysis of the process map, overarching themes that emerged include wasted usable food, the need for resource sharing and collaboration, and “last-mile” transportation needs (both the last mile from the food bank to the pantry and the last mile for home delivery for people who cannot make it to the pantry). The work group agreed that additional review will be necessary to examine the allocation of funds, since some program funds are designated for operational and staffing costs rather than the direct purchasing of food. Similarly, the work group discussed the importance of research so emergency food providers can better understand how much the charitable food system costs, including but not limited to community meals budgets; food budgets; breakdown of dollars spent on healthy food, staff, and fringe costs, transportation and infrastructure, in-kind/volunteering, etc. Increased funding is a key priority area, including increased transparency of available funding opportunities.

The final focus area identified by this work group was transportation, highlighting “last-mile” transportation needs. Individuals capable of driving to food banks and pantries may have a specific schedule that does not correlate with pantry hours. However, many innovative solutions exist such as outdoor coolers with a lock that drivers can access outside of pantry hours, Uber/Lyft-style models for pantries without fleet drivers, etc. The work group discussed increased efficiency resulting from going straight from the producer

to the pantry and pinpointed an educational resource on best practices as a useful resource for emergency food providers to increase their collaboration with one another.

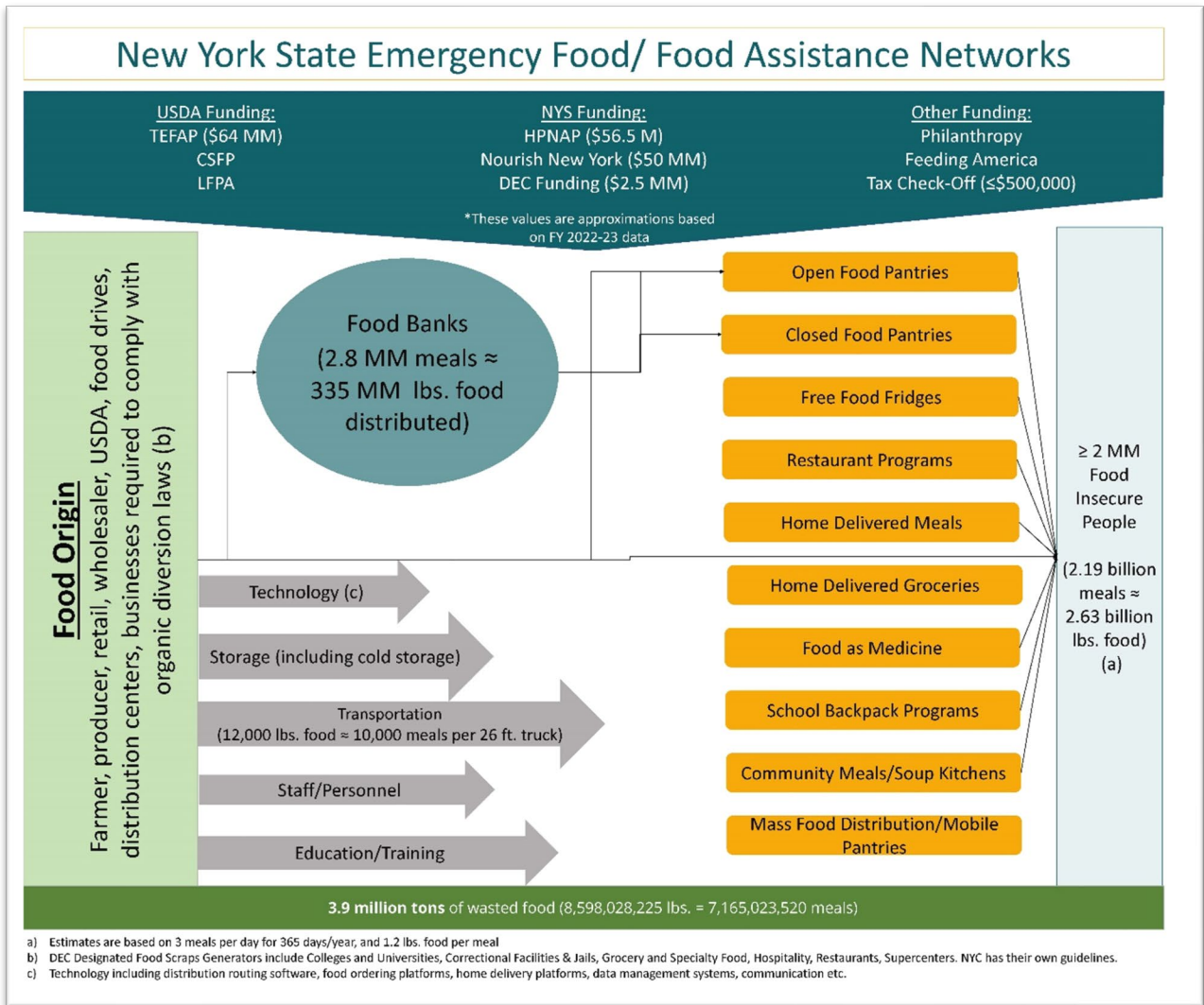


Figure 5. New York State Food Assistance Network

Recommended Food Policies and Actions For New York State

To address the barriers above and opportunities, the Strengthening Food Assistance Networks work group recommends that New York State act on the following recommendations:

1. Create a document that outlines all relevant funding sources and programs, and their eligibility criteria, that correspond with the areas of need identified by the work

group. Include best practices for food assistance organizations and models they can follow to facilitate collaboration and resource sharing between entities.

2. Encourage opportunities for state agencies to collaborate with stakeholders to increase applicants' knowledge of available funding opportunities; the request for proposal (RFP) application process and scoring criteria; procurement processes; and the new Statewide Financial System (SFS) process.
3. Create an interactive webpage for farmers and processors so that pantries can identify their closest food sources and direct purchase opportunities, ensuring a diversity of producers engaged with procurement.
4. Encourage continued collaboration between the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and food scrap generators to increase the diversion of food recovery items and food scrap recycling. Additionally, encourage continued education and outreach on food donation best practices.

D. Expanding Food Access Work Group

The affordability and physical accessibility of fresh food are among a multitude of barriers affecting food-insecure populations in rural and urban spaces. Lack of access to nutrition assistance programs and transportation options, insufficient infrastructure, and socioeconomic disparities contribute to the prevalence of food insecurity, as well as food deserts and food swamps.¹³ By coordinating stakeholders, these geographic and economic barriers may be alleviated to improve access to healthy fresh food and reduce hunger among New Yorkers.

The Expanding Food Access work group compiled recommendations that the state can take to maximize federal nutrition assistance programs, with a particular focus on emerging opportunities following recent federal policy changes. The work group discussed USDA's new Summer EBT (electronic benefits transfer) program, which states can opt into beginning in summer 2024. The program will provide \$40 in EBT food benefits per month for eligible children over the summer months when students lose access to school meals. The work group discussed the need for New York to take part in the program and provide the required state administrative matching funds. The work group also identified ways that members and other partners can support strong outreach and implementation.

Members also discussed the recent expansion of eligibility for the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), which allows high-poverty schools to provide breakfast and lunch to all students at no cost. Beginning in the 2023-2024 school year, New York established a CEP state subsidy to support full participation among eligible schools. Work group recommendations include further expansion of the state's investment in universal school

meals to cover all schools participating in the National School Lunch Program, including those currently ineligible for CEP. In addition to supporting food access, such an expansion could build buying power and capacity to help more schools to participate in the state's Farm-to-School incentive program, an ongoing focus of the Council. However, because of the practical impact the new state CEP provisions create in decreasing the incentive to participate in the 30% NYS Initiative school reimbursement, the Department is investigating ways the State may address this and maintain the intended positive impact on children and agriculture by including local food in school lunches.

The work group also discussed outreach opportunities to increase participation in SNAP. Members recommended robust outreach to support the forthcoming Restaurant Meal Program pilot, which will allow certain seniors, people with disabilities, and people who are unhoused to use SNAP benefits to purchase discounted meals from authorized restaurants. The pilot is expected to begin in early 2024, first in Monroe County and expanding to other areas of New York State over time. To address the need for strengthened outreach to increase SNAP participation among older adults, this group intends to remain in coordination with the Food and Nutrition Security work group as part of the state's Master Plan for Aging. Work group members highlighted the need for additional SNAP funding to support expanded outreach efforts; such funds would receive a federal match, drawing down additional resources to support state-level work.

The group also continued its focus on the state's development of an integrated eligibility system to support data matching and streamlined enrollment across benefit programs.¹⁴ State agency administrators are scheduled to provide an update to the group on these efforts in early 2024. Additionally, work group members discussed the need for comprehensive efforts and investments to address the root causes of hunger and poverty. The group has also begun conversations about ways to keep equity at the forefront of its work, including purposefully considering accessibility needs and culturally appropriate messaging as they further develop outreach recommendations in 2024.

Recommended Food Policies and Actions For New York State

To address the barriers above and opportunities, the Expanding Food Access work group recommends that New York State take the following actions.

1. Optimize existing resources and explore securing additional resources to facilitate participation in federal nutrition programs, by:
 - a. ensuring current allocations for SNAP and WIC outreach funding are programmatically adequate while maximizing any draw down of federal funds;

- b. increasing enrollment funding to CBOs to support Summer EBT, summer meals, and school breakfast outreach work;
 - c. considering investments in school meals to enable all schools participating in the National School Lunch Program to provide school breakfast and lunch at no cost to all students;
 - d. providing sufficient administrative funding to support the implementation of the Summer EBT program in 2024 and to ensure strong outreach and customer service;
 - e. considering how additional public resources could enhance the minimum SNAP benefit; and
 - f. considering opportunities for supplemental funding to ensure local WIC agencies can recruit and retain their workforce.
2. Encourage cross-collaboration between state agencies and partners to develop outreach campaigns to increase awareness of federal nutrition programs, including new pilots and policy changes such as:
 - a. the new Restaurant Meals Program pilot;
 - b. the Elderly Simplified Application Project, which streamlines SNAP enrollment and participation for older adults;
 - c. new exemptions to SNAP time limits for Veterans, people experiencing homelessness, and young people aging out of foster care; and
 - d. the Summer EBT program.
3. Improve technology to facilitate streamlined access to nutrition programs, including by accelerating the development of the state's integrated eligibility system. In the interim, explore current opportunities for data-matching at the state and county levels to ensure people who are enrolled in Medicaid, SNAP, WIC, and related programs are seamlessly connected with other benefit programs for which they are eligible.
4. Maximize existing authority and resources to expand access to federal nutrition programs, including:
 - a. encouraging county social service offices to use all available SNAP waivers;
 - b. expanding eligibility for SNAP to all low-income community college students and encouraging OTDA to work with SUNY, CUNY, and private institutions to inform financial aid counselors and students about student eligibility for SNAP and WIC; and
 - c. using existing household income forms to seamlessly certify eligible families for Summer EBT benefits in CEP schools.

V. Actions Necessary to Implement the Recommendations of the Council

When examining the economic vitality of agriculture and anti-hunger solutions in New York, it is important to recognize broader systematic changes necessary to make lasting change. Although the USDA defines a food desert by poverty and proximity to a grocery store, physical ability, age, mental health, racial segregation, and access to transportation additionally limit access to healthy fresh foods.

The above recommendations put forth by each work group, as tasked by statute, can be distilled into four main actions recommended to the state: targeted investments, cross-agency collaboration, awareness campaigns, and asset mapping and research.

To implement the recommendations of the Council and support the efforts of the work groups, the Council recommends comprehensive asset mapping to first determine more specific areas for opportunity for food procurement and food distribution, replicable models, and a quantitative analysis of barriers faced. This data repository would build off of existing data such as the [farmers' market list](#), [farm directory](#), [map the meal gap](#), and [food connect map](#), providing an inventory of resources including, but not limited to:

- institutional purchasing opportunities;
- infrastructure that accepts food (opportunities for food storage hubs, collective purchasing, and direct purchasing);
- desired culturally appropriate foods including identified needs to meet (product, amount, etc.);
- existing wholesale purchasing pathways; urban farms and community gardens; and
- gleaning opportunities.

Additionally, an initiative to “map the cash gap” is recommended, including federal funding, state funding, and philanthropy. A statewide initiative such as this would support the recommendations put forth by each of the work groups by identifying what is needed to purchase more New York products, particularly within the emergency feeding system. All the work groups identified resource mapping, particularly of funding, as vital to the successful implementation of their recommendations. A critical step is an evaluation of the charitable food system costs to understand their community meals budget, food budget, how much is spent on healthy food, staff, and fringe, transportation and infrastructure, in-kind/volunteer hours, etc. This “map the cash gap” initiative would highlight where New York State can leverage existing funds more efficiently, ultimately

strengthening food assistance networks, increasing procurement from New York farm and food businesses, and mitigating any existing supply chain gaps.

To further support the resiliency and efficiency of New York’s agri-food value chain, the Council recommends a focus on transportation, building off of the work of the [New York State Procurement Advisory Council](#). Priorities that are echoed by the Council on Hunger and Food Policy include:

- investing in increased transportation infrastructure to create more pathways for food to move across the state (i.e., roads, bridges, railways, ports, etc.);
- investing in strategically placed cold storage facilities to guarantee increased capacity to procure perishable fresh foods, preserving the integrity of the products and keeping them safe;
- reimbursing tolls and licensing fees for small to mid-sized transportation companies to mitigate barriers for truck drivers and local procurement companies traveling on roadways that are cost-prohibitive; and
- exploring the feasibility of other means of transportation throughout the state, such as light rail or boats on major waterways.

A. Next Steps

This report serves as a roadmap to help direct the work of the Council on Hunger and Food Policy and assist with outlining actionable steps for both private and public organizations. Looking ahead, the Council and its work groups will continue to meet to discuss how to accomplish these recommendations, update actionable items, and continue to proactively and equitably address strengthening New York’s food system to ensure viability for the agriculture industry and working to decrease food insecurity.

VI. Appendix

Table 1. A review of progress made on recommendations put forth by the Council in the [New York State Food Supply Resiliency Report](#) and the goals of the Council.

Recommendation	Program Working to Address This Recommendation
Strengthen Farm-to-School and Farm-to-Institution programs	2023-24 Enacted State Budget increased the statutory limit to school discretionary purchases of farm products; Executive

	Order 32 and Procurement Working Group
Encourage additional innovation in food processing plants to ensure modernization	Regional Food System Infrastructure Program
Prevent and reduce food waste	Nourish New York DEC Designated Food Scraps Generators
Expand meat processing and small livestock farms	Recent meat processing grant opportunities
Ensure that stakeholders can access available resource-based programs, including community groups operating education and technical assistance services and land access providers with a focus on creating greater equity in food systems	Northeast Regional Food Business Center Regional Food System Infrastructure Program
Provide technical assistance and equipment to farmers' markets and individual farmers to help increase acceptance of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) online	Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) Hybrid Redemption Pilot SNAP-Ed Food Box Program, Farmers' Market Nutrition Program , FreshConnect Checks , and New York State Wireless EBT at farmers' markets
Create better pathways to farm and food systems careers	Recent investments in agricultural workforce development , FMM Pro: SUNY Farmers' Market Managers Certification Program — Farmers Market Federation of New York

	NMANRRS chapter funding
Build on the existing Harvest New York urban agriculture and community gardens specialists' outreach efforts	Community Gardens Task Force Urban Farms and Community Gardens Grant Program , Soil Testing Program (currently in development), Community Gardens Leadership Program (currently in development), SNAP-Ed Community Growers Program
Coordinate with New York City's Department of Planning	Community Gardens Task Force
Diversify food manufacturing	Regional Food System Infrastructure Program
Developing a dashboard monitoring determinants of hunger and food insecurity	Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap Study
Focus on the infrastructure needed for better aggregation of food products and delivery to underserved neighborhoods	Procurement Working Group, Regional Food System Infrastructure Program , Food Access Expansion Grant Program, Farmers Market Resiliency Grant Program, FreshConnect expansion, and Fresh2You initiative , SNAP-Ed Food Box Program, Nourish NY New York Food for New York Families Program
Renew and expand the Grow-NY competition	https://www.grow-ny.com/

Invest in New York farms through Regional Economic Development Council dollars	\$5.8 million annually in NYS Grown & Certified grants for New York farms for five years
Providing support for the Cornell Small Farms Equitable Farm Futures Initiative	Funding provided in the State Budget
Building a stronger food supply system through agricultural and food resiliency teams	Harvest NY funding for SNAP-Ed technical assistance, community garden assistance, and Farm-to-School coordination
Create the nation’s only climate-resilient research farms and forests at Cornell University’s College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALs)	Cornell CALs has secured a \$5 million capital grant to help finish and equip the nation’s first indoor respiration chambers on a land-grant university scale suitable to test methane reduction technologies in livestock animals; it will be utilized to test, deploy, and demonstrate climate resiliency practices from constructed wetlands, soil health improvements, and other Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) conservation strategies for water mitigation and nutrient reduction such as bioswales
Foster innovation in digital agriculture and a continued revolution in the usage of remote sensing	Cornell CALs has created the Center for Digital Agriculture on the Ithaca campus, a partnership between Cornell CALs, Cornell Engineering, and Cornell Computer Science
Developing a farm-to-fork online marketplace	The Department has several New York farmers in the USDA approval queue to administer SNAP online transactions on the GrownBy (a New York company)

	<p>online marketplace; this opportunity is a pilot program administered by MarketLink</p> <p>Marketlink Offers SNAP Online Payment Solution for Direct Marketing Farmers.</p>
New York farm directory	The New York State Farm Directory
Adopting the comprehensive recommendations of the Commissioner’s Task Force on Equity and Inclusion	The New York State Diversity and Racial Equity Workgroup has continued to progress on these recommendations
Address housing issues for farm employees	Farm worker housing efforts coordinated with New York State Homes and Community Renewal (HCR) and Farm Credit East
Restructure and enhance state and federal feeding programs	Ongoing
Strengthen and scale up the Nourish New York and Restaurant Resiliency programs	Nourish New York was made a permanent program in statute and funded with \$50 million annually; the Restaurant Resiliency program was not funded, but the Restaurant Meals Program is using SNAP

VII. Endnotes

1. "Key Statistics & Graphics." Economic Research Service U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, 25 Oct. 2023, www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/key-statistics-graphics/#map.
2. "Self-Reported Food Insecurity Among New York State Adults by County, BRFSS 2021." New York State Department of Health, 29 Dec. 2023, www.health.ny.gov/statistics/prevention/injury_prevention/information_for_action/docs/2023-12_ifa_report.pdf.
3. Gregory, Christian A., et al. "Food Security and Food Purchase Quality Among Low-Income Households: Findings From the National Household Food Acquisition and Purchase Survey (FoodAPS)." United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, 2019, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/93725/err-269.pdf?v=6152>.
4. United States Department of Agriculture National Agriculture Statistics Service, Northeastern States' Ranking in the Nation's Agriculture: 2021; https://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/Regional_Office/Northeastern/includes/Publications/Rankings/2021%20Northeast%20States%20Ranking.pdf.
5. "New York Food for New York Families." Agriculture and Markets, <https://agriculture.ny.gov/new-york-food-new-york-families>. Accessed 18 Dec. 2023.
6. "Gleaning." Cornell Cooperative Extension Orange County, <https://cceorangecounty.org/gleaning>. Accessed 18 Dec. 2023.
7. "Farm donations to food pantries credit." New York State Department of Taxation and Finance, <https://www.tax.ny.gov/pit/credits/farm-donations-to-food-pantries-credit.htm#:~:text=How%20much%20is%20the%20credit,exceed%20%245%2C000%20per%20ax%20year>. Accessed January 4, 2024.
8. NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, Full Public Notice: Strategic Health Equity Reform Payment Arrangements: Making Targeted, Evidenced-Based Investments to Address the Health Disparities Exacerbated by the COVID-19 Pandemic (Apr. 13, 2022), https://www.health.ny.gov/health_care/medicaid/redesign/2022/docs/2022-04-13_1115_waiver_public_notice.pdf
9. 42 USC § 1315(a) (2023)
10. This percentage is calculated from 2021 (week 33) and 2023 (week 59) census bureau data on household numbers and includes both categories of 'sometimes not enough to eat' and 'often not enough to eat'. "Week 59 Household Pulse Survey: June 28 - July 10." United States Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2023/demo/hhp/hhp59.html>. Accessed 18 Dec. 2023.
11. Figure 4 was adapted within the context of the Improving Nutrition and Promoting Food as Medicine Work Group discussions, originating from FIMMA's Food is Medicine Pyramid. "FOOD IS MEDICINE INTERVENTIONS." Food is Medicine Massachusetts, n.d., <https://foodismedicinema.org/food-is-medicine-interventions>.
12. A Food Swamp is defined as an area with four (4) or more corner stores within 0.4 km (0.25 miles) of home or where the ratio of unhealthy to healthy food establishments exceeds 3.89. Chew A, Moran A, Barnoya J. Food Swamps Surrounding Schools in Three Areas of Guatemala. *Prev Chronic Dis* 2020;17:200029. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5888/pcd17.200029>.
13. The Integrated Eligibility System (IES) Program identified real-time Social Security Number (SSN) validation enhancements for Welfare Management System (WMS) entrants as a project that would improve social service district (district) processing of applications for assistance. "Administrative Directive." New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, <https://otda.ny.gov/policy/directives/2018/ADM/18-ADM-01.pdf>. Accessed 18 Dec. 2023.
14. A micro-business is defined as a firm with fewer than 20 employees, while a small business is defined as a firm with 20-49 employees; <https://esd.ny.gov/sites/default/files/2021-Annual-Report-on-the-State-of-Small-Business-Final.pdf>.