



## GOAL 1

# NY FOOD 2025

*Ensuring New York City's  
Food Policies and Programs Reduce  
Food Insecurity for All NYC Residents*



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NEW YORK CITY  
FOOD POLICY CENTER**



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## NEW YORK FOOD 2025 GOAL 1

# Ensuring New York City's Food Policies and Programs Reduce Food Insecurity for All NYC Residents

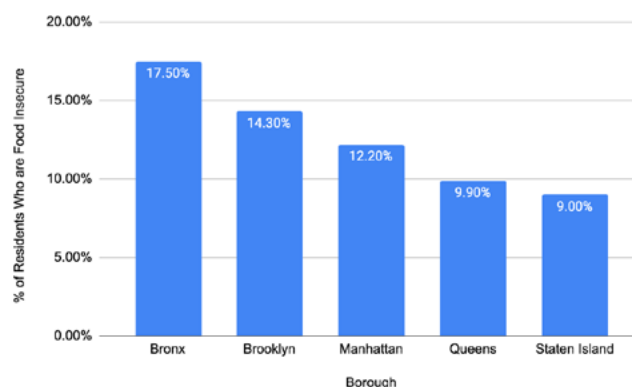
[New York Food 2025](#) is a collaborative effort by the Hunter College NYC Food Policy Center, The Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy, and The CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute to examine the effects of the pandemic on New York City's food policies and programs and propose specific policy measures the NYC Mayor and City Council can consider and implement to build a stronger, healthier, more just, and sustainable food system in New York City. This policy brief is one part of a 7-part series of policy briefs and recommendations and builds on our group's earlier report, [New York Food 20/20: Vision, Research, and Recommendations During COVID-19 and Beyond](#), on the impact of the pandemic on New York City's food system and food workforce.

## Background

Food insecurity is generally defined as the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or the inability to acquire them without resorting to emergency food supplies or other coping strategies.<sup>1</sup> In recent years, the City has made strides to reduce food insecurity among NYC residents; however, COVID-19 undermined much of that work and highlighted both the limited reach of those efforts and significant inequities in food security.

In its most recent Food Metrics Report released in December 2021, the NYC Mayor's Office of Food Policy estimates that approximately 1.4 million NYC residents (12.9%) are food insecure.<sup>2</sup> More specifically, the percent of residents who face food insecurity in each borough is as follows<sup>3</sup>:

Figure 1. Food Insecurity by Borough



Further, as a result of long-entrenched structural racism, Black and Latinx NYC residents disproportionately experience food insecurity.<sup>4</sup> Food insecurity has been repeatedly shown to be associated with diet-related chronic diseases<sup>5</sup> and with poor health and educational outcomes among children, even for children who are only marginally food insecure.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, as we have seen over the course of the pandemic, people of all ages who have obesity or other diet-related diseases experience higher risk of complications and death from COVID-19.<sup>7</sup> The imminent need to ensure food security for all NYC residents is clear.

## Existing Programs and Policies

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the City, State, and the Federal government moved rapidly to bolster existing food benefit and access programs and to launch new food distribution methods. Focusing specifically on the City's response, in March 2020, an interagency "Food Czar" team was formed to: (i) combat food insecurity caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and (ii) secure and protect the City's food supply chain.<sup>8</sup> In April 2020, the Food Czar team released the Feeding New York report that set forth the programs launched to address food insecurity, including, inter alia: (i) \$25 million investment in the City's food pantry system; (ii) establishment of a \$50 million emergency food reserve;

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**In the next four years, the Mayor and City Council should take measures to ensure that all pre-pandemic, crisis-specific, and emergency food policies and programs contribute to reducing food insecurity by making healthy, affordable, and culturally acceptable food available to all New York City residents.**

and, (iii) the creation of GetFood NYC, which included the Department of Education Grab & Go Meal program and the Emergency Food Home-Delivered Meal program.<sup>9</sup> In August 2020, the \$50 million emergency food reserve was transitioned instead to the Pandemic Food Reserve Emergency Distribution Program (“P-FRED”), with the intent of providing direct food resources to pantries and community organizations across the City.

The GetFood programs were authorized under an emergency rule and thus are designed to be short-term emergency relief programs. In an effort to provide long-term support for the City’s emergency food programs, the City has (i) allocated an additional \$27 million to P-FRED through FY 2022; (ii) increased funding for the Emergency Food Assistance Program by \$3.6 million; (iii) allocated an additional \$900,000 for equipment grants for City pantries; and, (iv) allocated \$600,000 to fund technology upgrades for the City’s emergency food network.<sup>10</sup>

The City’s efforts combined with New York State programs, such as [Nourish New York](#), which reroutes surplus agricultural products to New York food banks, and adaptations to Federal nutrition assistance programs have helped mitigate food insecurity during COVID-19.<sup>11</sup> Throughout the pandemic, the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (“USDA”) Food and Nutrition Service has worked with state, tribal, territorial, and local partners to distribute food and funding and to enact waivers and flexibilities (more than 4,000 issued nationally to date) to existing programs to enable states to best meet the needs of local communities.<sup>12</sup>

Early research indicates that the USDA’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (“SNAP”) has been one of the most effective nutrition programs to alleviate poverty during the pandemic.<sup>13</sup>

A recent scoping review of U.S. food policy responses to crises over the last twenty years<sup>14</sup> sheds light on the best practices for reducing food insecurity and addressing inequities related thereto during times of crisis. Based on their review, the researchers identified the following takeaways:

- High levels of engagement in food benefit programs among eligible populations during periods of non-crisis can be protective during periods of active crisis and its aftermath.
- Increasing maximum SNAP benefit to households can increase program participation, increase household resources for food purchases, and decrease food insecurity among very low-income households.
- Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility for SNAP at the state level can increase the pool of eligible households and promote program enrollment during economic downturn.
- Making SNAP more readily available to eligible Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents is an effective mechanism for increasing program enrollment by expanding the eligible pool of applicants and providing a greater incentive for households to apply.
- Policy modifications such as the SNAP Expanded Disaster Evacuee Policy and flexibilities to the Child Nutrition Program that enable multiple school districts to operate out of the same location but claim meals separately are effective mechanisms for serving misplaced individuals immediately after a crisis.<sup>15</sup>

Drawing on these lessons from the past and from assessing its COVID-19 response, the City can develop food programs and policies that complement State and Federal efforts to reduce food insecurity, thus maximizing the collective impact of these programs. While the City took steps to provide food assistance to those in need during the height of the pandemic, more investment was needed then and is needed now to permanently reduce - and eventually eliminate - food insecurity for NYC residents. The City's current investment in food assistance programs is a de minimis percentage of the City's [annual budget](#) of approximately \$102.8 billion.

## Policy Recommendations

To ensure that that all pre-pandemic, crisis-specific, and emergency food policies and programs: (i) contribute to reducing food insecurity and (ii) make healthy, affordable, and culturally acceptable food available to all New York City residents, the following policy recommendations should be considered by the City Council and Mayor Eric Adams.



**By the end of 2022, the Mayor and City Council should:**

**Improve the nutritional quality of food assistance programs.** As discussed above, food insecurity is associated with myriad diet-related chronic diseases that unfortunately resulted in higher rates of complications and death from COVID-19. Reducing food insecurity by ensuring access to nutritionally adequate foods will not only help prevent diet-related chronic diseases, it can help protect people from facing serious complications from COVID-19 and other infectious diseases. In addition to the equipment grants described above, the City should:

- Allocate additional funding for institutional kitchen infrastructure upgrades and professional development of kitchen staff. Having the skills and tools to prepare and safely store perishable foods is essential to increase freshly prepared and plant-based meals that are appealing in schools and other institutional settings. Providing nutritious meals via on-going food assistance programs as well as during crisis-specific events will improve the resiliency of NYC's food system and the overall health of its population.
- Work with State and Federal agencies to reduce complexities and streamline food assistance policies going forward. The waivers and flexibilities issued





during the pandemic by the U.S. Department of Agriculture with regard to the national school lunch program were critical to enabling schools to continue providing meals to students. An assessment of the execution of school meals during the pandemic should be conducted and the City should work with State and Federal agencies to streamline school food regulations. Additionally, the City should work with State and Federal agencies to expand SNAP benefits to enable more individuals to purchase nutritionally adequate food in times of need, with a focus on minimally processed fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.



**Between 2022 and 2025, the Mayor and the City Council should also:**

**Draft new preparedness plans for future large-scale states of emergency.** COVID-19 was and continues to be a novel threat to public health leaving too many NYC residents food insecure and at risk of becoming food insecure. The time is now for the City to reflect on successes and challenges to protecting food security during the pandemic and to use those lessons to prepare for the next – and inevitable – large-scale emergency.

- Funding should be allocated for the Mayor's Office of Food Policy to appoint a team to conduct a thorough trans-agency assessment of programs deployed during COVID-19.
- Draft updated preparedness plans based on results of the above assessment and establish procedures for regular scheduled review and updates to plans that address the nutritional quality of emergency foods, so that the City is ready to anticipate and effectively respond to future needs.

**Ensure food options are culturally inclusive.** NYC is home for people from a diverse range of cultures, including immigrants who comprise 36%<sup>16</sup> of the City's population. The City's food policies and programs should continue striving to embrace and respect this diversity. Research has shown that a lack of cultural inclusivity can be a barrier to people accessing food security programs.<sup>17</sup> Dietary restrictions related to cultural or religious beliefs may hinder people's ability to make use of food programs if inclusive options are not available (e.g. lack of halal or kosher options).

- The Mayor's Office of Food Policy should consult with food pantries, the Office of Food and Nutrition Services at the NYC Department of Education, the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, other agencies, and community-based organizations to gather community input on what is needed to ensure culturally inclusive food programs and policies in NYC.
- The City should support efforts of the NYC Department of Education to continue to expand the diversity of food options available in schools to be more inclusive of the variety of cultures in NYC.

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