



**Agriculture
and Markets**

New York State Council for Hunger and Food Policy 2022 Annual Report





Agriculture and Markets

RICHARD A. BALL
Commissioner

December 2022

Now is an exciting time to serve as chair of New York State's Council for Hunger and Food Policy. This year, Council members participated in the Department's Farm Bill listening sessions, which intended to inform national agriculture policy; witnessed the White House's second Hunger, Nutrition, and Health Conference in over fifty years; saw a rise in the value of nutrition as a long-term medicinal strategy; promoted participation in the 2022 Census of Agriculture; supported the national goal to end hunger and increase healthy eating and physical activity by 2030; and supported increased partnership activities between organizations and government agencies to address food insecurity.

I am pleased to share the Council's annual report, which outlines the group's activities and priorities in 2022 and provides insight into its plans for 2023. Specifically, it reflects on lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic about the reliability of our food system, food insecurity, and the activities that are impacting the food system nationally and statewide. The report prioritizes a number of challenges and opportunities in New York State's food system as identified by the Council, such as support for smaller growers, constraints of distribution networks, equitable food access, and participation in government food programs. The group received additional feedback on these topics through surveys, research, and discussions with experienced industry professionals.

There is an increasing awareness of the delicate interconnectedness of our food system, as displayed by rising costs, food shortages, and product line constraints on grocery store shelves. The Council continues in its strategic long-term efforts – informing food consumers and purchasers of their role in the food system while also supporting producers and processors within New York State.

On behalf of the Department, I sincerely appreciate the time and energy dedicated by Council members and affiliated organizations, New York State agencies, and consulting parties to best inform conversations, make recommendations, and prioritize concerns around this critically important issue. This report reflects this year's hard work and moves us in the right direction for the future.

Sincerely,

Richard A. Ball
Commissioner

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NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL ON HUNGER AND FOOD POLICY ANNUAL REPORT 2022

I. OVERVIEW

A. Mission

The New York State Council on Hunger and Food Policy (the “Council”) convenes to provide state policymakers with expertise on how to address food security and provide New York State residents with greater access to healthy, locally grown food.

B. History

The Council was developed to provide input on food-related, government policy decisions. Its identity evolved over the years. In 2007, former Governor Spitzer created the Food Policy Council through Executive Order No. 13. In January 2011, the Council evolved into the New York State Council on Food Policy when former Governor Cuomo’s Executive Order No. 2 (Review, Continuation and Expiration of Prior Executive Orders) continued Spitzer’s Executive Order No. 13. In 2013, former Governor Cuomo established the New York State Anti-Hunger Task Force to research issues related to hunger and to develop recommendations for the State’s consideration.

The 2016 State of the State proposed that the two groups merge to create the current New York State Council on Hunger and Food Policy, chaired by State Agriculture Commissioner Richard A. Ball.

The Council provides guidance to state policymakers on how to best address hunger and improve access to healthy, locally grown food for all New York State residents. Council members include experts and leaders in the fields of agriculture, food policy, hunger prevention, and healthcare.

In November 2022, Governor Kathy Hochul approved the bills (S.549-B and A.3954-B)¹ that codify the existence and purpose of the Council for Hunger and Food Policy, so it no longer operates under executive order. Cited as the “local food, farms, and jobs act,” A.3945-B directs the Council to develop comprehensive, coordinated state food policies with the goal of ensuring all citizens of the state are able to eat a healthy diet and avoid food insecurity while consuming as many New York grown and produced foods as possible. The legislation aims to formalize the Council and current membership to support continuation of current work.

C. Purpose of Report

The annual report provides an overview of the activities the Council has taken throughout the year in support of its mission and its goals moving forward. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed many

¹ As of March 3, 2023, the New York State Assembly bill A.00615 (same as Senate bill S.00829) proposing to amend Chapter 645 of the Laws of 2022 to clarify the provisions relating to the establishment and priorities of the Council for Hunger and Food Policy was signed by the Governor.

vulnerabilities in New York’s food system. The Council’s work in 2022 addressed these challenges, built on the heightened interest in agricultural sustainability, and raised federal attention to the issue via recommendations for the White House strategy on hunger, nutrition, and health.

The food system, or food supply chain, begins with agricultural producers and ends with the consumer. It includes processors, shippers, food brokers and wholesalers, grocery and convenience stores, and institutional food service entities. A Congressional Research Service report² released in May 2020 described the food supply chain as “[referring] to the path that raw agricultural commodities take from the farm where they are produced, through the food processing and distribution network to the consumer where they are used.” With regards to the food system, the Council plays a key role in advising the development of statewide policies and programs to improve consumer access to food, especially healthy, locally grown sources, while also addressing concerns about nutrition awareness.

Through the Council for Hunger and Food Policy, New York State continues its efforts to support and develop new opportunities to grow the state’s agriculture and food industries, enhance food security for all residents, increase employment opportunities in food-related businesses, and strengthen the links between consumers and farmers. New York State’s food system is made up of a series of food supply chains that developed over decades and evolved as a result of marketplace, product, and technological changes. This food system embodies significant broad and diverse financial investment, physical resources, and human impact statewide and on a local scale. The Council approaches this complex system with a ground-level and bird’s eye view perspective.

D. Convening

The Council convened multiple times in 2022 – in April, July, and November – to discuss priority concerns, make recommendations, and assess actionable activities. Members of the Council include leaders from throughout New York, representing state agencies, academia, nonprofits, and agricultural industries. Other organizations participate on the Council on an informal basis and provide additional perspective. A listing of the Council’s membership and affiliated organizations is located at the end of this report.

II. INFORMATION GATHERING

A. Working Groups

To best support more informed discussion and decision making during the Council’s meetings, five working groups meet outside of the full Council meetings and specialize in a key focus area.

² Schnepf, R., Monke, J., Congressional Research Service, COVID-19, U.S. Agriculture, and USDA’s Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP), May 8, 2020

The five working groups and their focus areas are:

(1) *Economic Vitality & Institutional Purchasing of Local Agriculture*

(Leader: Julie Suarez, *Cornell University, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences*)

Food policy stakeholders often have a gap in knowledge 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 yet farmer centered stakeholder group that focuses on maximizing local foods purchasing and economic opportunity to ensure a vibrant and healthy food system.

(2) *Strengthening Food Assistance Networks*

(Leader: Natasha Pernicka, *Food Pantries for the Capital District*)

There is a consistent demand for 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 in order to bring these foods to the communities that need them most. Facilitating access to locally grown, fresh 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 alternative market for New York State producers.

(3) *Expanding Food Access*

(Leader: Sherry Tomasky, *Hunger Solutions NY*)

The affordability and spatial accessibility of fresh food are among the greatest barriers affecting food insecure populations in rural and urban spaces. Lack of access to nutrition assistance programs and transportation options, insufficient infrastructure, and socio-economic disparities contribute to food insecurity, as well as food deserts and food swamps. Coordinating stakeholders can help alleviate these geographic and economic barriers and improve access to healthy, fresh food and reduce hunger among New Yorkers.

(4) *Improving Nutrition and Promoting Food as Medicine*

(Leader: Ellie Wilson, *Price Chopper Supermarkets*)

Several factors impact a consumer's ability to purchase healthy food and their desire to consume it. When this ability and desire is hindered for a consumer, there may be negative short- and long-term consequences for their mental and physical health. Improving healthful food access supports growth and well-being and prevents chronic illness. Food as Medicine initiatives have shown that the collaboration between government and community-based organizations may enhance access to targeted nutrition care and medically-tailored food solutions. These innovations advance state goals to improve health and reduce costs. Furthermore, alignment with agricultural capacity supports

development of infrastructure that will maximize value and quality of life for New York State residents.

(5) *Cultivating Food Equity*

(Leader: *Laura Gonzalez-Murphy, NYS Dept. of State-Office for New Americans*)

Individuals and communities should have equitable access to and equal ability to grow fresh culturally appropriate foods no matter their race, ethnicity, gender, immigration status, religious affiliation, or mental and physical health condition. Structural barriers to food equity must be acknowledged and addressed in order to holistically focus on improving the food security of New Yorkers.

B. Survey

The Council conducted a survey in preparation for its July 2022 meeting to engage and gather additional feedback from individuals and organizations involved in anti-hunger and nutrition related issues. The survey was distributed by Council members, affiliates, and their networks of organizations, and New York State leadership. Forty-two survey responses were received from a diverse array of non-profit leaders representing food banks, food pantries, food access advocacy groups, school programs, university-level education systems, government agencies, and individual food producers.

Survey questions were divided into the following topics to solicit input on challenges and on potential solutions in these areas:

- (1) Ending hunger
- (2) Improving nutrition and physical activity
- (3) Improving health and reducing diet-related disease

The underlined listed themes below reflect the most consistently identified challenges as raised in the survey responses. The Council focused their follow-up discussion in these areas:

- (1) Financial Constraints, especially balancing the rising cost of healthy eating while prioritizing living expenses in light of unemployment, underemployment, and inflation.
- (2) Government programs missing behavior incentives (in addition to creating barriers in process, communication, and coordination) limit participation and maximized benefits.
- (3) Limited Access to safe physical spaces and healthy food supported by inequitable solutions prevents engagement when recommendations and programs rely on presumed resources not readily available to the intended underserved populations.
- (4) Lack of Education, especially for nutrition and related needs, limits the correct application of available resources and restricts future opportunities.

- (5) Lack of Understanding the Full Impacts of Poor Health, including awareness of its connections to mental health, self-sufficiency, and finances.

The Council’s discussion during its July 2022 meeting focused on the survey responses it had received, which helped shape the Council’s priorities and recommendations to the White House for its national strategy on hunger, nutrition, and health (see “White House Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health” within this report).

C. USDA Census of Agriculture:

The Council relied heavily on basic demographic data, such as the information that comes from the Census of Agriculture, and market knowledge of agriculture throughout New York State for its discussions. Every five years, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) conducts a Census of Agriculture to update their complete count of America’s farms, ranches, and the people who operate them. The census looks at land use and ownership, operator characteristics, production practices, income, and expenditures to provide valuable information used at the local, state, and national levels to plan for the future and help ensure our country’s agriculture community receives the resources they need. Small plots of land growing fruit, vegetables, or some food animals count if \$1,000 or more of such products were raised and sold, or normally would have been sold, during the Census year. This census provides the data used in discussions of policy, funding, and other decision making vital to the agricultural community.

The most up-to-date Census of Agriculture reflects information collected in 2017. The USDA is in the process of updating the census with 2022 data, which will be released in 2023.

Table 1: Diversity of Agriculture - New York ³ (2017)

The wide diversity of agricultural production is a distinct strength of New York State. While dairy is the state’s largest agricultural sector, the variety of farms producing fruits and vegetables, fish, forest products, and complementary items for processing creates the foundation for a strong, sustainable, self-reliant food system.

Farm Type	Number of Farms	Land in Farms (Acres)	Market Value of Products Sold (\$) and Government Payments
TOTAL New York State	33,438	6,866,171	\$5,428,317,000
Oilseeds and grain farming	2,058	1,080,237	\$417,658,000
Vegetable and melon farming	1,978	284,824	\$376,233,000
Fruit and tree nut farming	2247	250,197	\$402,170,000

³ USDA Census of Agriculture for New York 2017. North American Industry Classification System. Selected data from Table 75. Under the NAICS census table, a farm is categorized based on the highest market value crop on the farm. Many farms have income from more than one farm product. For example, this explains why NAICS data shows a number for dairy farms different than the 2017 Census of Agriculture; there are 4,648 farms that have “milk cows” and 3,884 farms that have “income from milk from cows.”

Greenhouse, nursery, and floriculture	1,990	157,087	\$384,222,000
Hay and all other crop farming	9,636	1,801,627	\$335,834,000
Beef cattle ranching or farming	4,603	658,369	\$179,755,000
Cattle feedlots	165	46,156	\$34,348,000
Dairy and milk production	3,799	2,170,136	\$2,984,884,000
Hog and pig farms	380	22,434	\$21,421,000
Poultry and egg production	517	41,998	\$199,705,000
Sheep and goat farming	1,201	64,692	\$14,944,000
All other animal production including aquaculture, equine, and apiculture	4,864	288,414	\$77,144,000

Table 2: Selected Producer Information – New York (2017)⁴

Demographic information reflecting the makeup of New York’s producers and the types of farms is useful to assess opportunities to connect with distinct perspectives and experiences, especially when learning to overcome shared operational challenges.

TOTAL PRODUCERS	57,865
Male	35,985
Female	21,880
Race and Ethnicity	
American Indian/Alaska Native	125
Asian	166
Black or African American	139
Hispanic, Latino, Spanish origin	606
More than one race	240
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	40
White	57,155
Occupation	
Primary Occupation is Farming	28,343
Primary Occupation is not Farming	29,522
Age	
Under 35	6,026
35-64	34,889
65 and older	16,950

Table 3: Selected Production and Marketing Practices and Value Added – New York (2017)⁵

⁴ USDA, Census of Agriculture for New York State. 2017, data from Chapter 1, Table 52.

⁵ USDA Census of Agriculture for New York State, 2017. Chapter 1, Tables 2 and 51

In conjunction with demographic data, market information is useful in narrowing the source of systematic barriers resulting in inequitable access to products.

	Number of farms	Value of Sales (\$)	Percent of Total Agricultural Sales	Average Per Farm
Food sold directly to consumers	5,697	\$222,711,000	4.1%	\$39,093
Food sold directly to retail markets, institutions, or food hubs	1,587	\$316,286,000	5.9%	\$199,288
Farm value-added ag products sold	1,977	\$182,305,000	N/A	\$92,213,000
Farms with organic sales	1,330	\$206,462,000	3.8%	\$155,234

III. 2022 COUNCIL ACTIVITIES

The supply chain disruptions that were brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic caused New York’s producers and the food service industry to abruptly lose significant markets, including schools and restaurants. Since then, the Council has been working to identify opportunities to close these gaps and strengthen the food system. The Council for Hunger and Food Policy used recommendations from its 2021 New York State Food Supply Resiliency Report, which was developed in collaboration with New York State’s Empire State Development and Cornell University’s College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, to identify priorities and strategies for 2022 discussions and activities.

The Council began 2022 focused on improving the resiliency and self-reliance of New York State’s farm and food supply, especially as related to food shortages, food waste, and the inability to get farm goods to market. The 2021 recommendations were reassessed in 2022 with the intent to improve strategic priorities to align with the changing environment and strengthen the long-term resiliency of New York State farmers and food supply chains.

A. Department of Agriculture and Markets’ Programs

As part of the Council’s April 2022 meeting, representatives from the Department of Agriculture and Markets briefed Council members on the following programs that directly impact the Council’s mission to combat food insecurity and address the resiliency of the food supply chain.

(1) Nourish New York

- a) The Nourish New York program helps people facing food insecurity access the food they need while providing a market for New York farmers to sell their products. Launched as a temporary, emergency-relief program, New York’s emergency food providers purchased surplus products from New York farmers and processors to

deliver to New York families in need. Nourish New York is administered through a state partnership between the Department of Health and the Department of Agriculture and Markets, working closely with the ten regional food banks and 37 additional sub-awardees in New York State.

- b) Governor Hochul signed legislation codifying the Nourish New York program into law November 2021 (Chapter 631 of the Laws of 2021), transitioning it from an emergency feeding program to a permanent resource. Aided by Council input from COVID-19 pandemic lessons learned, the permanent program has (i) a streamlined reporting process for its feeding partners in the program; and (ii) more seasonal planning with stakeholders.
- c) Program results:
 - i. During Rounds 1-4 (May 1, 2020 to December 31, 2021), more than \$72 million was spent on New York State-produced agricultural products.
 - ii. These purchases created 41.4 million meals for New Yorkers in need and impacted 4,200 New York State farms and businesses.
 - iii. Purchases consisted of approximately 30% dairy products, 30% produce, and 40% other products (meat, poultry, seafood, eggs, processed items).

(2) Restaurant Resiliency

- a) Built on the successful Nourish New York initiative, the Restaurant Resiliency Program (RRP) set aside \$25 million to provide grants to restaurants that offer meals and other food-related items to New Yorkers within distressed or underrepresented communities. Administered through a partnership between the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, New York State Department of Health, and the Regional Food Bank Network, restaurants directly accessed funding to create and deliver meals to Emergency Food Providers (EFPs) throughout the state.
- b) Regional food banks played an essential role in the RRP, partnering with the Department to review and approve meal plans while helping to ensure the capacity of the site to distribute the meals.
- c) Program results:
 - i. More than \$23 million was allocated directly to New York State restaurants starting November 1, 2021 through the program's end in March 2022.
 - ii. RRP provided approximately 1 million restaurant-crafted meals serving each region's unique needs and cultural considerations. More than 53,000 Kosher meals and 64,000 Halal meals were provided to families.
 - iii. 370 restaurants were approved to access RRP funding – 56 restaurants were minority-owned businesses and 49 restaurants were women-owned businesses

(3) Local Food Purchasing Assistance Cooperative Agreement (LFPA)

- a) Through the USDA's Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement (LFPA), the Department of Agriculture and Markets received an initial \$25.8 million award to implement the New York Food for New York Families Program. This program works to develop a more resilient statewide food system that supports local farms and provides high quality, nutritious food to communities facing food insecurity. The award allows for food purchases that also support local and traditionally disadvantaged farmers by building and expanding economic opportunities and creating new marketing channels for them within the state while ensuring local food gets to New York families in need. The Department has been subsequently notified of the ability to apply for an additional \$23 million award of LFPA funding for food purchases.
- b) Over the course of the two-year program, the majority of the award will be spent on food purchases, both fresh and processed. Projects may engage stakeholders from private, public, for-profit, and non-profit entities.
- c) LFPA awards will be distributed through a competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) process as well as a non-competitive RFA opportunity. The New York Food for New York Families funding opportunities were released on November 2, 2022. RFP (Track 1) is for projects ranging from \$200,000 to \$2 million. The non-competitive RFA (Track 2) is for projects ranging from \$10,000 to \$50,000.

Working Groups

Five working groups were essential to coordinating efforts, minimizing redundancy of activities, and best using resources in support of the Council's goals. The following highlights additional stakeholder engagement and the activities of the individual working groups.

(1) Economic Vitality & Institutional Purchasing of Local Agriculture

Note: Formerly named "Increasing the Knowledgebase of New York State Supply Chains," the group's name was changed in 2021 to align with a narrower focus and to best clarify purpose moving forward.

- **Activities:** The working group focused on procurement opportunities of New York State products, including values-based procurement that is applied to institutional settings and procurement policies so awards better align with the priorities of the purchaser. Cost-based decision-making unrelated to value, such as lowest bid evaluation and distribution driven selection, too often results in missed in-state opportunities that may support communities and the broader New York supply chain.

The group discussed the New York State's Farm to School program and the growing network of Cornell Cooperative Extension, BOCES, and other team partner regional procurement coordinators. More schools are meeting the threshold for the 30% reimbursement, and a recent Cornell University study using City of Buffalo School

District purchasing data concluded that the economic benefit of the 30% local school purchasing incentive program exceeds the cost – i.e. for every dollar spent by the state to incentivize local, nutritious school meals, each dollar generates an added \$1.54 in economic benefits: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4208161.

Based on feedback and problem solving from the working group, New York State grown apples are now on the approved federal funding list for eligible purchasing by New York City schools. This supports the incentive for this in-state purchase by a district system serving over 1,800 schools with collectively over one million students served meals throughout the school year. The group created recommendations for the state to consider ensuring that these values are supporting local farmers. There are additional opportunities to evaluate food procurement channels to ensure in-state resources are prioritized in emergencies and regional market needs.

(2) Strengthening Food Assistance Networks

- **Activities:** The working group began the year with an assessment of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT), and identified distribution logistics as the primary point of continued discussion. Distribution logistics impacts the types of food available, equity of food types, food waste, nutrition, and more. Vehicles are often delayed in the supply chain, creating rippling logistical issues in distribution. Most funding opportunities focus on food, however the working group recognized that there is a need for consistent funding for transportation logistics in the emergency food network, especially driver training, fuel, and equipment. This specific funding is especially valuable as many food network organizations commit to pay a living wage. A briefing with a logistics expert from Relay Integrated Logistics & Solutions provided insight into general distribution industry challenges and identified the strategic value of focusing on the circulation of food rather than warehousing. This shift in strategy reduces storage costs and related food waste while supporting advancing food distribution to the consumer.

Recognizing that delivery logistics is a complex challenge, especially as the need remains to build the supporting workforce, the working group narrowed its focus to New York State's food banks and food pantries.

(3) Expanding Food Access

- **Activities:** Driven by gaps in enrollment in federal nutrition programs and recommendations in the 2021 Food Supply Resiliency Report, the Expanding Food Access working group's initial efforts focused on using technology to reduce barriers to participation in supplemental food programs, support equity, and bridge gaps in the process. Additional research by the group targeted the potential use of integrated eligibility systems (IES) to streamline systems so a single person can quickly identify program eligibility and more easily complete application processes that are currently

disjointed and often repetitive. For example, IES could play a key role automating rules, case management, and workflow system for more timely and accurate eligibility determinations for Medicaid and other human services programs, such as cooperation between SNAP and WIC.

The group looked at the possibility of using IES for federal feeding programs; however, resource and technology constraints between administrative entities, programs, and agencies limit quick progress, especially as some systems currently operate at capacity. Still, to increase enrollment in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for seniors, Hunger Solutions New York partnered with the New York State Office of Temporary Disability and Assistance (OTDA) to simplify the SNAP application and begin using IES. The group proposes to continue raising awareness of IES as a viable opportunity in the future and to provide input to the Council to support its use. There is also opportunity to shape communications and education to reduce the stigma that too often hinders enrollment in food access programs.

(4) Improving Nutrition and Promoting Food as Medicine

- Activities: Food nutrition knowledge and access to healthy food foster healthful growth and help prevent diet-related illnesses. When coupled with appropriate education or clinical nutrition care, consuming healthy foods can improve management of diet-related chronic disease, resulting in higher quality of life and decreased insurance costs for care. This concept supports the idea for a spectrum of “Food as Medicine” programs as a long-term strategy for enhancing physical and mental health, especially to address preventable diseases. Pilots and privately funded models show strong results in New York but require sustainable funding to scale and maximize benefits. There was an opportunity to make food an eligible cost under Medicaid through the federal 1115 waiver, submitted by New York State’s Department of Health (DOH). The DOH briefed the working group to improve its understanding of the Medicaid process addressing food insecurity and agency updates to better integrate nutrition services and improve access to healthy food through the Medicaid program.

The workgroup identified multiple opportunities to connect New York State agriculture and food production with channels of healthy food access and nutrition care that will be explored further in 2023. Suggestions included aligning food assistance programs to incentivize healthy purchases and improving the efficiency of supplemental programs used at farmers’ market.

“Food as Medicine” programs operate in other states, and the working group committed to assess models for process, sustainable funding, resource needs, and compliance resolutions in effort to learn best practices and consider this as a viable option in New York State. The state’s first independently coordinated Food as Medicine convening in June 2022 was led by Council working group leader Natasha

Pernicka. This meeting set the stage for future conversations and coordination for a Food as Medicine initiative.

(5) Cultivating Food Equity

- **Activities:** The COVID-19 pandemic enhanced our focus on food access, but not food equity. Language access, digital literacy access, and connections to producers are common concerns among community-based organizations. The working group identified language access as one of the largest barriers to participation in supplemental food programs. The Cultivating Food Equity working group determined to address this barrier when they recognized the lack of clarity regarding the attestation requirement for The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). TEFAP is a federal program that helps supplement the diets of low-income Americans by providing them with emergency food assistance at no cost. Each state operates TEFAP using federal funds. A requirement of state administration of the program is an attestation from all program participants to verify eligibility. New York required a written attestation – suspended in lieu of the verbal equivalent to adapt to COVID-19 pandemic urgency. The working group pursued retaining the verbal attestation to fulfill the federal requirement and permanently remove the optional written equivalent.

Speaking with the New York State Office of General Services-Food Distribution, the group confirmed that administration of the federal program does not require written attestation and that verbal verification is acceptable for program participation. The use of the verbal attestation reduces a significant language access barrier that too often discourages eligible persons from pursuing government resources and services. This change in policy is especially impactful as New York State has seen an influx of New American and immigrants in need of services who also multiple challenges simultaneously, such as food, housing, education, and language access.

C. White House Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health

(1) Background

The Biden-Harris Administration recognized the need to reassess hunger, nutrition, and health concerns since the first and only White House Conference on the topic was held in 1969 and continues to influence the country's food policy agendas today. This includes school lunches, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program. **The September 2022 conference was driven by the White House's goal to end hunger and increase healthy eating and physical activity by 2030.** The goal aims for fewer Americans to experience diet-related diseases, such as diabetes, obesity, and hypertension, all of which disproportionately impact underserved communities.

[The Biden-Harris Administration National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health](#) was

developed based on the input collected through nationwide regional listening sessions, guided independent group conversations, and direct email submissions from representation of the full diversity of U.S. stakeholders. The strength of the strategy is in its foundation, incorporating stakeholder engagement from anti-hunger and nutrition advocates, food industry companies, the health care community, local, state, territorial, and Tribal governments, people with lived experiences, and various levels of government entities amongst many others.

To best organize input and support the 2030 goal, strategic recommendations were organized into the following five topic pillars:

a. Improve food access and affordability:

End hunger by making it easier for everyone—including individuals in urban, suburban, rural, and Tribal communities, and territories—to access and afford food.

b. Integrate nutrition and health:

Prioritize the role of nutrition and food security in overall health—including disease prevention and management—and ensure that our health care system addresses the nutrition needs of all people.

c. Empower all consumers to make and have access to healthy choices:

Foster environments that enable all people to easily make informed, healthy choices, increase access to healthy food, encourage healthy workplace and school policies, and invest in public education campaigns that are culturally appropriate and resonate with specific communities.

d. Support physical activity for all:

Make it easier for people to be more physically active—in part by ensuring that everyone has access to safe places to be active—and increase awareness of the benefits of physical activity and conduct research on and measure physical activity.

e. Enhance nutrition and food security research:

Improve nutrition metrics, data collection, and research to inform nutrition and food security policy, particularly on issues of equity, access, and disparities.

(2) Council Recommendations

The strategies and actionable recommendations below were submitted to the White House Team requesting input for the development of a national strategy on hunger, nutrition, and health to reach the targeted goal. The following recommendations were derived from survey data and Council discussion. The strategies are proposed to realize the federal government's goal and align with the White House's five pillars.

a. Improve food access and affordability:

- i. Encourage the production of specialty crops through strategic investments.* This strategy aims to increase the availability of and access to specialty crops, such as fruits and vegetables. Investing in these crops and investments in grower and processing innovation should increase vulnerable populations' financial accessibility to them. Further strategic investment can influence affordability for purchase and, thereby, consumption of fresh, healthy food.
- ii. Streamline food systems to maximize efficiency.* A point of accountability is needed in the delivery, distribution, and transaction services of the food system to increase responsible financial access and production. This will also increase the population that can expand its purchasing and consumption of fresh, healthy products since they are now more financially accessible.
- iii. Strategically address the links between poverty, hunger, nutrition, and health.* It is important to recognize the complex interconnection between nutrition education, food systems, physical health care services, mental health influences, and household income. A diverse federal level inter-agency task force that would discuss and problem-solve direct and indirect factors and challenges in these areas would add valuable perspective and help to identify solutions. For example, the USDA may connect with the federal Department of Commerce, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Transportation, Internal Revenue Service, and Department of Education to pursue innovative approaches to common workforce development needs that would ultimately support increasing consumers' financial ability to access food. There are links between poverty, stress, and chronic medical conditions. Directly addressing poverty positively impacts the individuals and their households, thus improving medical, financial, and housing statuses.

b. Integrate nutrition and health:

- i. Integrate "Food as Medicine" into healthcare programs.* This will support the removal of financial barriers that currently limit access to healthier food options and will increase personal nutritional knowledge – guided by a prescription that prioritizes long-term health benefits and values nutrition counseling. Recognizing the connection between food insecurity and chronic health conditions, Food as Medicine programs use medically-tailored nutrition education to improve diets. Program participants are further supported with guidance to access and prepare the foods. In addition to supporting positive health effects, this effort increases food security while reducing the financial burden of ongoing medical expenses.
- ii. Improve and expand valuable government programs,* especially those successfully aiding the food insecure while also benefitting local food

providers. New York State presented [Nourish New York](#) as an example of a valuable program developed to meet a temporary need that has been supported for continued operation. Nourish New York provides a platform for the state's growers, suppliers, and processors to connect with food banks to support the purchase of food, which is then distributed to struggling communities. Coordination among farms, emergency food providers, and the State minimizes the financial and psychological barriers accessing the program. Struggling populations are best served when there's an effective network of communication between government agencies and non-profit organizations.

c. Empower all consumers to make and have access to healthy choices:

- i. Incentivize the purchase of healthy foods via government programs.* Supplemental Security Income (SSI), SNAP, and WIC participants would increase program purchases of fruits and vegetables when they are given an enhanced value in comparison to highly processed soda products with low nutritional value. For example, New York's Double Up Food Bucks program matches SNAP dollars for eligible food purchases with a 50% discount off produce. This not only incentivizes increased consumption of fresh food, but also supports the purchase of fruits and vegetables grown in New York State and sold at local markets.
- ii. Simplify coordination between government programs to ease eligibility and participation.* Struggling populations are often eligible to participate in multiple assistance programs but do not participate for several reasons. Mixed promotion of programs negatively impacts public awareness and navigating the requirements of different programs is a challenge. This issue has been tackled through New York's FreshConnect Checks program, which expands fresh food access to underserved communities by increasing the purchasing power of SNAP while supporting local growers and farmers' markets. In later coordination with the New York Division of Veterans' Services (DVS), Active-Duty members, Veterans, and eligible family may now participate in this program. Continuing this cooperation between agencies, this year county-level Veterans service agencies now aid in distribution of FreshConnect Checks. General use of technology and other means to create common processes and complementary systems can increase access by removing barriers present in multiple application processes, duplicate documentation needs, and different payment methods.
- iii. Fund the establishment of school gardens.* This directly connects young consumers to their food, better integrates nutrition curriculum, and increases interest in agriculture careers. Existing programs may be scaled to support broader participation. In addition to hands-on engagement and nutrition education, school gardens support meal preparation, safe food handling

practices, connections with local growers, and physical movement within a learning environment.

d. Support physical activity for all:

- i. Promote work and school environments that support physical movement.* Resources should incentivize innovative ideas that reinforce the value of physical activity. Youth wellness programs incorporate app technology with character-building challenges to achieve 60 minutes of daily physical activity. Increasing the activity of a single individual will increase the physical health of their household.

e. Enhance nutrition and food security research:

- i. Healthcare and health insurance industries should use long-term timeline metrics.* As opposed to current metrics of up to five years, long-term timelines better align with the long-term medical cost savings and overall household health benefits gained through consistent preventative measures. These measures, such as ongoing counseling with a registered nutritionist, result in individual savings, increasing spending power to diversify food choice and alleviate some poverty concerns.
- ii. Understand the full impact of food insecurity and poverty.* It is valuable to recognize the direct and indirect connections regarding financial literacy, mental health care, and the development of self-sufficiency.

IV. 2023 PRIORITIES

The Council, during its November 2022 meeting, reflected on the year's activities to strategize and best prepare for 2023. In anticipation of federal support for the White House's 2030 goal, the Council strategically aligned its plans within the Five Pillars framework.

A. Short-term Priorities: Leveraging Working Groups

a. Economic Vitality & Institutional Purchasing of Local Agriculture

New York State's Farm to School program supports local growers through connections to area schools. In addition to a favorable cost-benefit analysis, the program reflects promising growth potential. The working group plans to assess opportunities to further support the Farm to School Program. This support aims to increase program participation, which complements the working group's efforts to address the increasingly prohibitive "last mile" of delivery – a notable challenge connecting growers to schools with cost prohibitive smaller market bid sizes. The group will continue assessment of models to adopt for values-based procurement (a.k.a. good food purchasing programs). These models enable state agencies and local municipal institutions a platform to confer the greater economic benefit to local agricultural products through "true cost of food" calculations and to utilize the

state's existing, more stringent standards on food production and processing as a certification factor that is not additive to farmer and food system costs.

b. Strengthening Food Assistance Networks

Collaborative communication between food pantries and food banks lays the groundwork for a stronger and more focused approach to reach the populations needing services. To address statewide delivery logistics for food assistance communities, the working group is focusing on united efforts between food pantries and food providers (food banks and other community-based organizations). The priority is to connect with the largest food banks in the state to identify the primary physical sites of distribution activities, establish communication to share information, collaborate, and locate resources to address gaps where food needs to be picked up.

While strengthening the statewide network of distribution for food assistance, the group also plans to: (1) identify solutions to transport and distribute food resulting from the Food Donation and Food Scraps Recycling Law, e.g., logistics and training for safe food handling and (2) identify partners to build out the statewide map and database of community pantries.

c. Expanding Food Access

Integrated eligibility systems (IES) remain a topic of ongoing discussion as technology progresses to increase connections between evidence-based benefits and diverse programs. The working group sees value in the assessment of opportunities for Farm to School's incorporation into a state-level universal school meals program as a means to support food access. This involves further review in the capacity of the agriculture sector and exploration of the benefits for immigrants and schools. This will be balanced with efforts to identify where gaps need to be filled to support community-based organizations working on food rescue.

d. Improving Nutrition and Promoting Food as Medicine

In addition to supporting conversations between Food as Medicine leadership and active stakeholders, the group is coordinating with an inter-agency working group to organize an inventory of nutrition services and health-related programs within New York State. This inventory may be used to identify gaps in service and needs met. It also continues to identify functional Food as Medicine models to assess New York's ability to adapt this initiative. Best practices gained from procurement and distribution models will aid in the development of efforts within the state, e.g. Farm to Institution New York State (FINYS.org) and Good Food Purchasing (GoodFoodPurchasing.org).

e. Cultivating Food Equity

Support for diversity in food production remains a priority concern since this is the originating source for the distribution of cultural foods for underrepresented

populations. The working group aims to identify New York State farms committed to producing food meeting the culinary interests of the underrepresented and marginalized communities. The group will do this through a survey. Part of this work also requires the flexibility to adjust to the shifting demographics of the cultural and agricultural needs of the immigrant and refugee populations.

B. Long-term Priorities:

The Council identified the group's long-term priorities based on impact and capacity.

(1) Health and Nutrition Resources

As working groups develop the inventory of New York State's health services, nutrition programs, and underserved cultural food growers, the Council will be briefed on any gaps in areas of program participation and coverage. This will also feed discussion on the viability of Food as Medicine models in New York State. With aligned resources and support, there is opportunity for food product purchase contracts for institutional markets (e.g., hospitals and schools) to consider nutrition targets during evaluation. Such evaluation efforts would improve alignment of the coordination of agricultural production with medically tailored nutrition programs. When resource development and research progresses to the point of decision-making, the Council will identify goals and next steps.

(2) Values-based procurement

To effectively assess bids for procurement evaluation beyond lowest cost, Cornell University partnered with the Rockefeller Foundation for a True Cost of Food project to develop a scientific and algorithm-based means to include intangible factors into assessment criteria, such as environmental impact of production, cultural appropriateness, and incorporation of local products. With the collaboration of agency input, the aim is to develop a procurement model that effectively and systematically considers overlooked intangibles in evaluation and include alignment of values to bids and proposals. This translates into considerable opportunity for a more holistic evaluation process in government procurement. To strengthen the development of the model, Council organizations are encouraged to participate in interviews and other thought sharing with the True Cost of Food Team.

(3) Food Access

Council discussions continue regarding how to address the complex issues involved with food distribution logistics statewide, especially "the last mile," and to improve connections between upstate and downstate growers and producers. The group is also working on recommendations to expand engagement in Farm to School as a means to support improved food access and food equity.

2022 Membership and Affiliated Organizations

The Department appreciates the commitment of Council members and organizations to strengthen and develop New York State’s diverse and far-reaching food system. Names annotated with (*) identify persons that have separated from their organization.

Council for Hunger and Food Policy 2022 Members and Delegates

Membership consisted of leadership from the following organizations and New York agencies:

Name	<i>Organizations and Government Entities</i>
Commissioner Richard E. Ball (Chair)	<i>New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets</i>
Commissioner Betty A. Rosa and Kathleen DeCataldo	<i>New York State Department of Education</i>
Commissioner Daniel W. Tietz and Donna Forino	<i>New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance</i>
Giovanni Holmquist* and Allison Argust	<i>Empire State Development</i>
Stephen Cook*, Jill Dunkel and Danielle Quigley	<i>New York State Department of Health</i>
Greg Olsen	<i>New York State Office for the Aging</i>
Stephen O'Brien	<i>NYC Department of Education—School Food</i>
Kristen McManus	<i>American Association of Retired Persons</i>
Rick Naczi*, Tim Cooley, and Steve Terzo	<i>American Dairy Association and Dairy Council</i>
Dr. Melony Samuels	<i>The Campaign Against Hunger</i>
Julie Suarez	<i>Cornell University, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALIS)</i>
Jeff Crist	<i>Crist Brothers Orchards</i>
Tessa Edick	<i>FarmOn! Foundation</i>
Dr. Camesha Grant and Leslie Gordon	<i>Food Bank for NYC</i>
Mitch Gruber	<i>Foodlink</i>
Marcel VanOoyen	<i>Grow NYC</i>
Joel Berg	<i>Hunger Free America</i>
Sherry Tomasky*	<i>Hunger Solutions New York</i>
Randi Shubin Dresner	<i>Island Harvest Food Bank</i>
Jeff Williams and Renee St. Jacques	<i>New York Farm Bureau</i>
Jennifer Martin	<i>New York School Nutrition Association</i>
Ellie Wilson	<i>Price Chopper Supermarkets</i>
Karen Washington	<i>Rise & Root Farm</i>
Mark Bordeau	<i>Rural Health Network</i>

Affiliated Persons and Organizations

Name	Organizations and Government Entities
Fran Barrett	<i>New York State Governor's Office</i>
Commissioner Ann Sullivan and Merrill Rotter and Dana Cohen	<i>New York State Office of Mental Health New York State Office of Children and Family Services</i>
Sheila Poole	<i>New York State Department of Environmental Conversation</i>
Kristine Ellsworth	
Commissioner RuthAnne Visnauska and Kate VanTassel	<i>New York State Homes and Community Renewal</i>
Kathleen Finlay	<i>Glynwood Regional Center for Food and Farming</i>
Commissioner Jeanette Moy and Gabrielle Viens	<i>New York State Office of General Services New York State Department of State-Office for New Americans</i>
Laura Gonzalez-Murphy	
Viviana DeCohen	<i>New York State Division of Veterans Affairs</i>
Liz Ward, Bronwyn Starr and Julia McCarthy	<i>New York State Health Foundation New York State Office of Temporary Disability Assistance</i>
Susan Zimet	
Deborah Stanley and Megan Conroy	<i>State University of New York</i>
Kim Vumbaco	<i>State Education Department</i>
Casey Marvell	<i>Adirondack Council</i>
Jerome Nathaniel	<i>City Harvest</i>
Dan Egan	<i>Feeding NYS</i>
Natasha Pernicka	<i>Food Pantries for the Capital District</i>
Kenneth E. Raske	<i>Greater New York Hospital Association</i>