

New York State Council on Hunger and Food Policy 2024 Annual Report



Department of
Agriculture and Markets

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Introduction

This report was developed by the New York State Council on Hunger and Food Policy and it represents a wide scope of stakeholder perspectives. Special thanks to Council members and affiliates for their diligence at meetings over the course of the year to gain consensus on the contents of this report.

Hunger Data and Trends

Hunger Across the United States

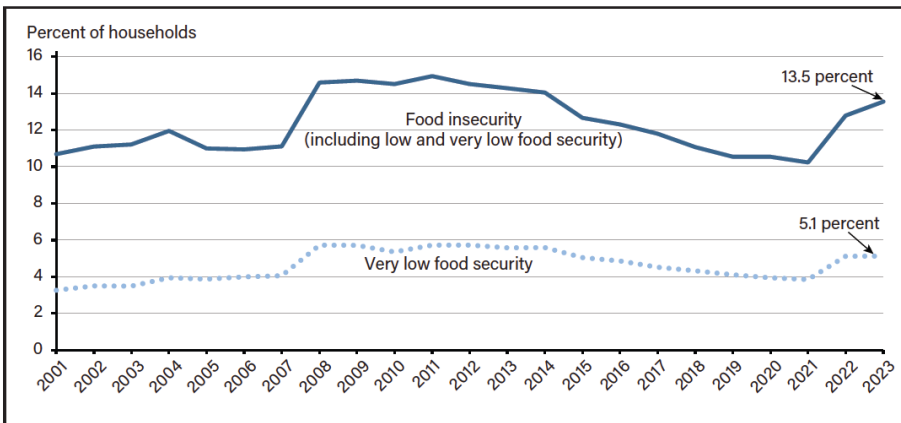
The United States (US) government measures hunger, food hardship, and household food insecurity nationwide and at the state level in two ways: 1) the US Census Bureau uses the Household Pulse survey to measure how many Americans do not have enough food over a series of one week periods throughout the year; and 2) the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) measures the number of Americans who live in food insecure homes, meaning “their ability to acquire adequate food is limited by a lack of money and other resources.”ⁱ

The number of Americans who did not have enough to eat over two, one-week periods increased by 55.2 percent between August and September 2021 and August and September 2024, according to the US Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey data analyzed by Hunger Free America.ⁱⁱ Many experts attribute that spike in food hardship to the federal rollback of expanded Child Tax Credits, the end of expanded SNAP (food stamps allotments), and the termination of universal school meals, coupled with the impact of inflation.

Released in 2024, a USDA Economic Research Service (ERS) study of household food security in 2023 reported most households in the US have access to enough food for active, healthy living and are recognized as *food secure*. The remaining 13.5 percent (18 million households) in the US are recognized as *food insecure*, meaning they had difficulty providing enough food for all their members on a consistent basis because of a lack of resources during 2023. Households with children, non-white households, and low-income families disproportionately faced these conditions.

Food insecurity trends from 2001-2023.

Prevalence of food insecurity in 2023 increased from 2022



Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey Food Security Supplements data.

Trends show the prevalence of food insecurity is increasing across the US in recent years. The 2023 prevalence of food insecurity was significantly higher than the 12.8 percent recorded in 2022 (17 million households) and 10.2 percent in 2021 (13.5 million households). The chart on the previous page shows trends in food insecurity since 2001.ⁱ

Hunger in New York

The number of New York State residents who did not have enough to eat over two, one-week periods was 76.1 percent higher in August and September of 2024 than in August and September of 2021, according to the US Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey data analyzed by Hunger Free America.ⁱⁱ

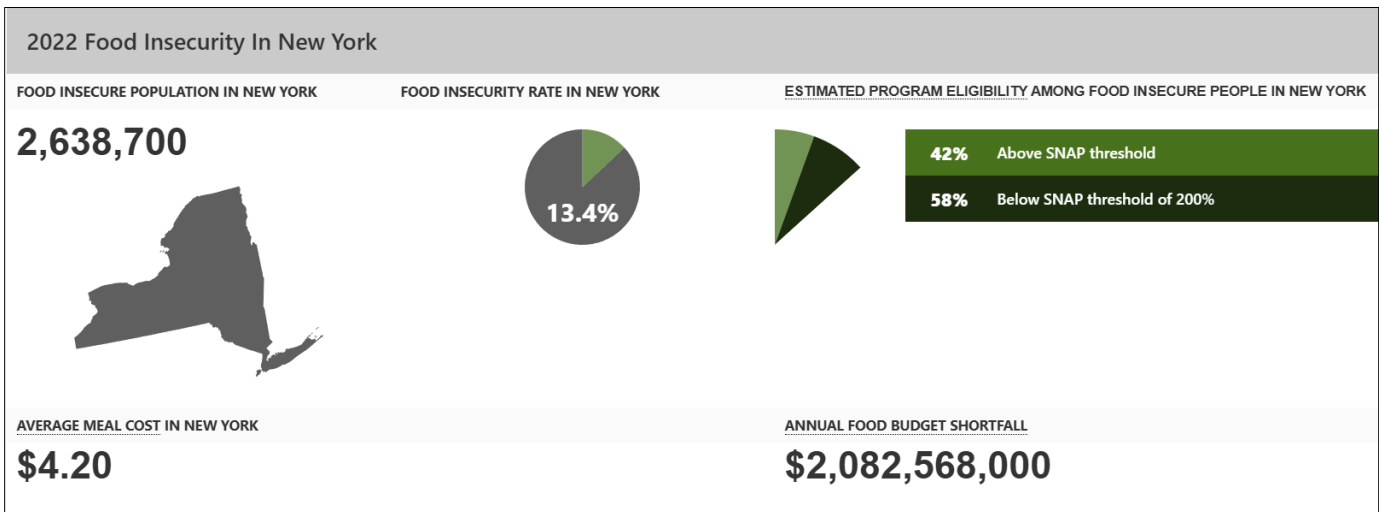
With an estimated 7,760,000 *households* across New York State, the prevalence of food insecurity is reported by the USDA ERS as 12.3 percent (954,480 households) over the period studied from 2021 to 2023. This prevalence increased from 10.5 percent since the last reporting period from 2018 to 2020, likely due to the pandemic, but it matches the national average according to the USDA ERS.ⁱ

According to Hunger Free America’s analysis of the USDA ERS data, that means 2.4 million state residents lived in food insecure households from 2021 to 2023. This includes 16.3 percent of children in the state (647,509), 9.6 percent of employed adults (866,737), and 8.7 percent of older residents (412,248).

According to USDA, food secure households nationwide spend \$15 per month more on food than is spent by food insecure households. Consequently, if all New York State residents in food insecure households were able to spend as much on food as those in food secure households, that would produce an additional \$1.8 billion in food spending.

Using a different methodology that incorporates several other indicators of hunger, the *overall population* analysis by Feeding America produced a slightly higher 13.4 percent food insecure population across New York in 2022. This equates to over 2,638,700 people (including children). The data also highlights that 42 percent of the food insecure population (1,530,446 people) were eligible for SNAP benefits but did not receive enough funds to supply all their food needs.ⁱⁱⁱ

2022 Food insecurity data presented by Feeding America.



Based on the Feeding America report, funding to help food insecure New Yorkers meet their basic needs and feed their families is short by over \$2 million a year (see figure on previous page). This does not take into account the households who do not qualify as food insecure based on federal standards, but who still need help due to the unaffordability of other essential costs of living in their region.

There are several rigorous methods for measuring income inadequacy and regional-based costs of living. In New York, the Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) method offers a local and supplemental indicator to the USDA food insecurity report. For example, ALICE households earn more than the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), but not enough to afford the basics where they live (e.g., housing, childcare, food, transportation, health care, and technology). United Way reports that 15 percent of households across New York earned below the FPL in 2022. Of the households that earned above the FPL, 31 percent were ALICE households. Combined, this equates to 46% of households in New York who were struggling to make ends meet in 2022.^{iv}

Underlining both ALICE and food insecurity metrics are public policy, public health, natural disasters, and other events and programs that impact food insecurity. One of the largest and most recent factors that continues to impact the ebb and flow of food insecurity rates is COVID-19 and the public policy decisions that were made along the way. While the COVID-19 pandemic brought unexpected challenges, it also spurred temporary expansion of federal public assistance through pandemic relief measures such as changes to SNAP. This extra support reverted to pre-pandemic levels around the time of the expiration of the federal public health emergency declaration in 2022 and families are still struggling to rebound from the effects of the assistance rollback.^v The gap in federal public assistance is only partially filled by New York State investments, so community benefit organizations must rely on philanthropy to ensure adequate service levels.

Complicating an already challenging environment, New York's farmers are facing a number of challenges and the state's ability to sustain adequate food production is at risk. In 2022, New York's farms paid a total of \$6.2 billion in expenses, an increase of \$1.9 billion from 2017. From 2012 to 2022, hired labor expenditures grew by 68 percent, far surpassing other categories. Despite economic growth, between 2012 and 2022, the state lost close to 14 percent of its farms and over nine percent of farmland. New York is losing farms and land faster than nationwide averages. The overall decline of farmland is troubling, as conversion to other uses (e.g., residential, commercial, industrial, and even some uses defined as agricultural) may prevent land use for food production in the future.^{vi}

Food Policy in New York

Changes in federal leadership may impact funding, programs, and policies related to nutrition safety net programs, farming, farm workers, food production, nutrition education, community programming, and emergency feeding at the state level. New York leaders must support the region's farmers, farm workers, and food insecure population by proactively mitigating challenges related to federal policy shifts, including funding reserves to bridge anticipated gaps in food access programming.

Addressing food insecurity and ensuring nutrition security is a priority across New York State, with many New York state agencies tackling the broader food policy challenge from multiple angles in collaboration with regional partners appointed to the Council on Hunger and Food Policy. Following are some highlights of food policy and related programs across the state.

Executive Initiatives

Governor Kathy Hochul issued Executive Order 32 (EO 32) in 2023 directing state agencies and authorities to increase the percentage of food sourced from New York farmers and producers to 30 percent of their total food purchases by the end of 2027. For 2023, New York State agencies and authorities surpassed the first-year goal of five percent by purchasing nearly 15 percent New York State food products. This initiative strengthens the agricultural industry by creating additional demand for New York-grown agricultural products and leverages state funding to provide locally produced food to people in need.

Department of Agriculture and Markets (AGM)

AGM administers the New York Food for New York Families program to maintain and improve food and agricultural supply chain resiliency in New York State. This funding is provided by the USDA Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program (LFPA). AGM has awarded over \$40 million to a diverse group of 116 organizations across New York, including food banks and pantries, schools and universities, farm collectives, medical centers, and a variety of non-profit organizations, to implement projects that purchase New York-grown food products and distribute them to underserved communities. USDA announced in October 2024 that a new round of funding will be available to continue this program.

Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC)

DEC enforces the Food Donation and Food Scraps Recycling Law, offering an opportunity for businesses and institutions that generate large volumes of wasted food (e.g., grocery stores, full-service restaurants, and supercenters) to donate viable excess food to organizations serving those in need. The most recent DEC report published in 2024 indicates 266,468 tons of food was donated in 2022 by businesses and institutions that must comply with the law. Feeding NYS and its regional affiliated food banks continue to be critical partners in this initiative and, with funding from DEC, have assisted in diverting 32 million pounds of food since 2022.^{vii}

Department of Health (DOH)

DOH monitors progress on New York's Medicaid section 1115 waiver through rigorous independent evaluations to determine outcomes and impacts. For context, in 2024 the US Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services approved an amendment to New York's Medicaid section 1115 demonstration that bundles a series of actions to advance health equity and strengthen access to primary and behavioral health care across the state. This allows New York to make large investments in wide-ranging Medicaid initiatives, including food access.^{viii} DOH is also a coordinating agency with AGM to administer the Nourish New York program, which has supplied to underserved families over 100 million meals featuring local ingredients since its inception in 2020.^{ix} The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), administered by DOH, helps over 400,000 pregnant women and families of young children afford baby formula and nutritious food.

Department of State – Office for New Americans (ONA)

ONA assists all new Americans in accessing and navigating a variety of free services, including food access programs, and supports their inclusion as an integral part of New York State's diverse cultural

fabric. The ONA hotline (1-800-566-7636) confidentially connects new Americans to ONA resources in over 200+ languages and is a reporting tool for fraud and scams against immigrant communities. With a direct connection to new Americans, ONA provides important perspective to shape food assistance offerings, ensuring representation of culturally appropriate and religiously required foods.

Department of Veterans Services (DVS)

DVS offers mobile outreach vans to provide a unique and secure space for Veterans, Service Members, and Military Families to meet in confidence with a Veterans Benefits Advisor accredited by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). From the mobile van, eligible individuals can enroll in various benefit programs and can also obtain their annual allotment of FreshConnect Checks to purchase locally grown food at farmers' markets. Additionally, DVS continues to maintain a valuable partnership with the HelloFresh corporation, New York City's Department of Veterans' Services, Black Veterans for Social Justice, and several other community-based organizations, leading to the donation and distribution of more than 1.5 million healthy meals for Veterans in need since the collaboration began in the summer of 2020.

Empire State Development (ESD)

ESD incentive programs attract food manufacturers and agribusinesses to New York by offering tax incentives, training, loans, grants, and innovation development. This comprehensive support promotes a healthy economy and a resilient food supply chain. ESD has supported agribusinesses whose products are sold to institutions statewide, including food banks and food pantries. ESD coordinates The Interagency Food Manufacturing Strikeforce to bring together state agencies to help identify shovel-ready sites and expedite the approval process for food manufacturing facilities in the state.

Office for the Aging (OFA)

OFA coordinates with AGM to implement the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) that gives eligible, low-income older adults \$25 in coupons to buy locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables at participating farmers' markets in New York State. Booklets are available in July and may be used through November. They are given out on a first-come, first-served basis at senior centers across the state. Farmers' markets provide up-to-date information about healthy eating and host cooking demonstrations at the markets, using local produce. Adding more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains to senior meals may improve their health and longevity. This program also helps support farming, a major part of the state's economy.

Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS)

The New York State Office of Children and Family Services oversees several initiatives that are specifically focused on food-related challenges for families. These include the HEARS (Help, Empower, Assess, Reassure, Support) Family Line, which assists families by providing resources and referrals to a variety of services including food, clothing, housing, medical and behavioral health care services, parenting education and childcare. Another focus is the William B. Hoyt Memorial Children and Family Trust Fund, which supports programs focused on improving the safety and well-being of children and adults at risk of or experiencing child abuse, intergenerational abuse, and/or domestic violence. Programs supported by the Hoyt trust fund receive additional funds if they provide services that help families experiencing food insecurity and/or inadequate housing.

Office of General Services (OGS)

OGS oversees The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), which supplies food banks and food pantries with USDA foods. The latest round of USDA funding was announced at \$500 million to purchase domestic commodities, including New York State grown and produced products. OGS estimates just over \$30 million will be available to New York for food purchases in 2025. Additionally, OGS provides centralized contracts for state agencies and other authorized users to purchase products, including food. To assist in meeting EO 32, OGS worked this year with food contract providers to accurately highlight products that meet New York sourcing requirements. In addition, OGS supports state-contracted service providers and state agencies, in collaboration with AGM, to assist them in meeting EO 32 annual milestones that support New York's farmers and food producers.

Office of Mental Health (OMH)

The OMH Fresh Foods and Healthy Eating Program (FFHEP) is a new intervention that increases knowledge, access, and affordability of fresh produce among individuals with serious mental illnesses (SMI) living in settings with OMH oversight. In 2024, a trained residential staff person convened over 100 individuals in group classes to build skills around shopping for, preparing, and enjoying vegetables and fruits. OMH collaborates with mobile markets or farmers' markets near each residence so that FFHEP participants have physical proximity to farm-fresh produce. AGM has also partnered with OMH to ensure FFHEP clients participate in the FreshConnect Checks nutrition incentive program.

Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA)

OTDA is the administering agency for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). As the state's primary safety net food assistance program, SNAP helps over 1.6 million families (nearly 3 million individuals) afford food each month using EBT-based food benefits, redeemable at participating grocery stores and farmers markets. OTDA also administers the SNAP's Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention (SNAP-Ed) program, which is a statewide network of over 40 federally funded organizations, contracted to provide free nutrition education to all eligible and participating SNAP clients. OTDA is also the coordinating agency for Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT), with support from SED. Beginning in Summer 2024, New York State implemented this new, permanent federal program which provides food benefits to low-income households with school-age children to purchase food over the summer when school is out of session and children can no longer rely on access to free/reduced price school meals.

State Education Department (SED)

The SED Summer Food Service Program provided free meals to approximately 400,000 young people statewide in 2024. An interactive USDA online map was available to help families search for a service site by address, city, or zip code. Children were able to visit one of the nearly 2,500 designated summer meal sites statewide, where free meals are available.^x The agency also administers the National School Lunch Program's Free/Reduced Price Meal program and the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), which allow most children attending school in New York State to access no-cost nutritious breakfast and lunch as part of their school day. SED and Cornell Cooperative Extension also host the New York State Farm to School Summit, which fosters business-to-business relationships and reinforces the importance of providing fresh, local foods to New York State students while providing opportunities for New York State farms to grow and thrive. The summit welcomed 537 attendees,

including K-12 food service, farmers, food producers, educators, district administrators, government agencies, and support service providers.

Council Overview

Council History

The New York State Council on Hunger and Food Policy (the Council) was created in 2016, merging the previously existing 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 Senate and Assembly Bills S.5490-B and 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 the makeup of the Council membership. By law, the Council meets at least twice a year and publishes an annual report outlining its activities, the progress made towards achieving its goals, recommended food policies, and action items necessary to implement recommendations.

Council Members and Affiliates

Council members include 25 appointed representatives across multiple sectors of New York's agri-food value chain, including food charities, mid-sized farms, state agencies, and a growing number of anti-hunger advocacy affiliates. The participants are driven by a desire to pursue effective and empowering policy interventions to build food equity in New York State's food system.

Underlying the Council's objectives are its member institutions' vision for greater diversity in the food system, both in terms of voices from food system sectors and 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.

A list of 2024 Council members and affiliates is included in the Appendix.

Council Structure

The Council is currently chaired by AGM Commissioner Richard A. Ball. With the coordination role seated in this Department, there is a unique opportunity to connect farmers with stakeholders to address hunger through the lens of creating a resilient and equitable regional food system.

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.^{xi} However, the agricultural industry is not without its challenges as farmers face fluctuating commodity prices, development pressure, labor availability, and adequate processing capacity.

AGM is committed to combatting food insecurity and hunger across the state by helping New Yorkers increase their access to fresh, local, healthy foods while accomplishing its mission of supporting new

economic opportunities for farmers. AGM leads the coordination of the Council, collaborating with many other state agencies and informed stakeholders across New York.

To achieve the goals of the Council, four work groups are focused on:

1. **Economic Vitality:** Ensure New York farmers are thriving and can sustain food production.
2. **Food As Medicine:** Improve the nutritional quality of foods provided to people in need.
3. **Food Assistance Networks:** Strengthen connections between supply chains and organizations helping people in need.
4. **Food Access Programs:** Leverage public dollars to address the needs of food insecure people across the state.

Each work group has been tasked with a set of priorities. 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 recommendations.

Council work groups and responsibilities referenced in law (2023).

Economic Vitality Work Group	Food as Medicine Work Group	Food Assistance Networks Work Group	Food Access Programs Work Group
<p>Expand agricultural production and processing.</p> <p>Help local farms and food businesses to succeed and grow, especially historically marginalized groups.</p> <p>Coordinate interagency initiatives promoting food and farm products.</p> <p>Eliminate statutory and legal barriers hindering the local food economy.</p> <p>Initiate and facilitate public awareness campaigns about the economic benefits of local food.</p>	<p>Ensure availability of and expand access to an adequate supply of affordable, fresh, and nutritious food.</p> <p>Eliminate barriers impacting a consumer’s ability to purchase healthy food.</p> <p>Encourage state agencies and community partners to share ideas for reducing food-related chronic illness and promoting child nutrition.</p>	<p>Facilitate the building of infrastructure, including but not limited to aggregation, processing, storage, packaging, distribution, and marketing facilities.</p> <p>Support and expand programs that recruit, train, and provide technical assistance to supply chain partners.</p> <p>Facilitate the use of public lands to grow local food products.</p>	<p>Reduce barriers affecting urban and rural food-insecure populations.</p> <p>Improve access to nutrition assistance programs to reduce socio-economic disparities.</p> <p>Alleviate geographic and economic barriers to improve access to healthy, fresh food.</p>

Council Activities

In 2024, the full Council convened on May 22 and September 30, in person and virtually. The meetings included time to hear updates and feedback from each of the four work groups and provide critical input into the creation of this report. They also provided an opportunity to reflect on the past few years, speak to current challenges, and identify next steps.

At its May 22, 2024 meeting, the Council heard related New York State agency updates on: Meat Processing (AGM); Summer EBT (OTDA); Restaurant Meals Program (OTDA); Data Matching for WIC-eligible Families (DOH); 1115 Waiver (DOH); and the Food Manufacturing Interagency Strikeforce (ESD). The Council also reviewed the recommendations from the 2023 Annual Report, which were distilled into four main actions recommended to the state, including: targeted investments, cross-agency collaboration, awareness campaigns, and asset mapping and research.

During its September 30, 2024 meeting, the Council heard related New York State updates on: FreshConnect Checks (AGM); Farmers Market Nutrition Program (AGM); Farm to School (AGM); New York Food for New York Families (AGM); and the Food Access Expansion Grant (AGM). The Council also 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.

Meeting materials can be viewed at agriculture.ny.gov/council-hunger-and-food-policy.

Economic Vitality Work Group Activities

Group Lead: Julie Suarez, Cornell University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

Group Goal: Ensure New York farmers are thriving and can sustain food production long-term.

Supplying local foods for local families has long been a hallmark of the work of the Economic Vitality work group. Significant progress has been made this year under Governor Hochul's Executive Order 32, with purchases of New York foods exceeding the initial 5 percent target for the first year and instead reaching nearly 15 percent. This equated to approximately \$78 million in New York food purchases in 2023 compared to \$14.9 million the year before.^{xii}

Another exciting new project, the Cornell True Cost of Food Calculator, was also launched in 2023. The digital tool for state agencies considers the economic and environmental factors that make local foods the least costly overall option for institutional purchasers.

Progress has also been made in the Farm to School arena, with more local schools stepping up their purchasing efforts and qualifying for the additional financial incentives of the 30% NYS Initiative to ensure school kids have access to fresh, locally grown foods. As of this report, 73 School Food Authorities are being reimbursed through the program.

Data released by USDA National Agricultural Statistical Services (USDA NASS) showed more New York farmers reporting net losses than net gains in the last Census of Agriculture.^{xiii} The twin pressures of the pandemic recovery and inflation placed pressure on input costs, while reduced farm income and a wide array of climate stresses from droughts to floods hurt specific commodity sectors across the state. The work group discussed the need to attract more food processing to New York, recognizing that more market options will help drive economic success in the farm community.

Great success was achieved in the dairy sector, with new expansions announced in the past year bringing an anticipated \$1 billion in new private sector dairy processing capacity.^{xiv} The work group, however, notes that farm numbers continue to decline in New York and across the nation as production costs have skyrocketed, according to data from the USDA 2022 Census of Agriculture.

The work group suggests that additional attention be paid to the health and viability of New York's family farms, with a high priority placed on farm economics. Tax policies like the Farm Employee Overtime Credit are welcomed and hoped to provide some relief. However, careful attention must be paid to implementation, as delays in farmer receipt of the Investment Tax Credit and the Farm Employer Overtime Credit can make it very difficult for farmers to balance budgets.

Following is an overview of progress on 2023 recommendations:

- **Incentivize farmers to participate in institutional food procurement:** Executive Order 32^{xv} has produced a significant focus on procurement, linking farmers to institutional buyers.^{xvi} Additionally, AGM programs such as New York State Grown & Certified and Farm to School have produced resource materials to streamline the process and secure sales of New York products. Cornell's True Cost of Food Calculator^{xvii} is a new tool for agencies to evaluate procurement decisions on factors other than the lowest cost.
- **Attract food manufacturing operations to support value-added processing:** The New York State Food Manufacturing Interagency Strike Force addresses obstacles for large-scale food processors moving operations to New York. The intent is to attract new food processors who can help produce supply to meet the demands of state procurement regulations and incentives. The primary coordinating agencies are AGM and ESD. Programs such as the Excelsior Jobs Program tax credit^{xviii} and capital grants offered through the Regional Economic Development Councils^{xix} have received positive responses via ESD.
- **Study the advantage of processing food in New York compared to other states:** The work group identified that it would be helpful to conduct an objective study to examine the incentives and attractiveness of doing business in New York State against those of other states in the Northeast region. This has not yet occurred, but the study would function as a needs assessment to make recommendations for new policies or programs that could support the expansion of new mid-tier markets for New York products and attract more food processors to New York.
- **Assess farmworker housing incentives and streamline program delivery:** The Cornell Agricultural Workforce Development team has developed a resource, *Tools for Managing Farm-Provided Employee Housing*^{xx}, to address common challenges. Farmers can reach Cornell staff to ask detailed questions of specialists. Additional challenges include zoning and code variables across the state that could impact the viability of farm worker housing development.^{xxi} The Farmworker Housing Program^{xxii} is a low-cost loan program established in 1995 that assists New York State's agricultural industry by providing financing assistance to improve existing housing or construct new housing for farmworkers (whether seasonal or year-round).
- **Reconvene the SILO work group to ensure stakeholder feedback is prioritized:** The Strategic Interagency Task Force Lessening Obstacles^{xxiii} to Agriculture (SILO) Work Group^{xxiii} was a convening of state agencies and agricultural community stakeholders to discuss administrative actions that could be taken to help improve communications, reduce burdensome requirements that were limiting growth for the industry, streamline business for New York farmers, and provide an immediate and timely response to important issues around supporting and expanding food production in New York. As the work group is currently dormant, the Council recommends its

reconvening to address specific issues with programs such as overtime tax credits, low-interest housing loans, and infrastructure grants that are in effect, but not fully addressing industry needs.

A list of recommendations for 2024 is provided later in this report as a roadmap for future work.

Food as Medicine Work Group Activities

Group Lead: *Ellie Wilson, MS, RDN, CDN, Price Chopper & Market32 Supermarkets*

Group Goal: *Improve the nutritional quality of foods provided to people in need.*

Food as Medicine interventions are an evolving spectrum of programs and services that address diet-related health issues using nutrition-based solutions. Food as Medicine initiatives include: the provision of food assistance such as produce vouchers; 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 Food as Medicine Work Group offers insights and recommends policies that help New Yorkers to obtain healthful, regionally grown and produced foods that meet nutritional, social, and cultural needs while creating an equitable, circular, sustainable food system that supports well-being and a robust agricultural economy.

In 2024, the work group celebrated the 1115 waiver^{xxiv} and its significant funding increase for DOH. The waiver authorizes the highest-ever funding for the State to pay for services that address health related social needs and to support the infrastructure needs of the entities that will connect Medicaid members to these services. It offers an unprecedented opportunity to connect agriculture to nutrition treatment and security, ultimately delivering improved health outcomes and quality of life for New York residents.

Registered dietitian-nutritionists are now recognized for their critical role in developing and delivering food as medicine interventions, a welcome development in the field. Funding for these important professional services and locally sourced healthy food is positively impacting health outcomes. Critical expertise provided by community-based organizations (CBOs) will continue to transform the prevention and treatment of chronic, diet-related diseases over time.

Supported by nearly \$20 million in USDA funding as part of AGM's Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure program,^{xxv} these policy shifts are fueling an evidence-based and data-informed transformation that will ensure a robust future for our bountiful state. The work group members are energized and ready to continue this important work in 2025.

Following is an overview of progress on 2023 recommendations:

- **Encourage CBOs to participate in Food as Medicine programming:** CBOs are currently navigating the most recent 1115 waiver and will provide feedback to facilitate meaningful participation as new nutrition and clinical nutrition care systems are developed. The work group identified that additional support is needed to support operating expenses for CBOs as they see an increased number of patrons during the transition to social care networks. Additionally, support is needed to provide a safety net for those patrons who are ineligible for benefits.
- **Create an asset map linking agricultural production to Food as Medicine programming:** Although some supply chain asset mapping has been done to link farmers and producers to

institutional buyers, additional work is needed to add information about food access partners. New York State Food as Medicine Coalition has begun to map Food as Medicine providers and potential suppliers, and this work continues via stakeholder surveys.^{xxvi} The goal is to improve communication, awareness, and collaboration between stakeholders working on supply chains, food access, and nutrition education.

- **Study nutritional labels and facilitate products to meet Food as Medicine requirements:** The goal of this recommendation is to guide New York producers toward participating in the expanding market for qualified Food as Medicine and other nutrition-focused food product formulations. The work group held a special session with DOH in 2024 to further investigate HPNAP “My Plate” nutrition standards and how product formulations might be adjusted for products to meet procurement requirements. Additional work is needed to understand how product formulations could be updated to expand offerings for Food as Medicine programming at various levels,^{xxvii} from produce prescriptions to medically tailored meals and grocery items.

A list of recommendations for 2024 is provided later in this report as a roadmap for future work.

Food Assistance Networks Work Group Activities

Group Lead: *Natasha Pernicka, Alliance for a Hunger Free NY, Food Pantries for the Capital District*

Group Goal: *Strengthen connections between supply chains and organizations helping people in need.*

There is consistent demand for fresh, nutritious foods in the community-based food distribution network. When food pantry customers are surveyed, they consistently say they want more fresh foods such as dairy, produce, and meats. Fresh foods provide a valuable source of nutrition, and many options are grown and produced here in New York State.

Fresh foods are often highly perishable and must be delivered promptly to communities that need them. As such, the work group identified a need for increased logistical innovation, resources, and coordination among partners. 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 charitable food system and emergency food network. Simultaneously, the effort provides an additional market for New York State producers.

Food pantries sharing data with The Alliance for a Hunger Free NY reported 20 to 100 percent service level increases in 2023 compared to 2022. Capital Region food pantries are reporting an additional 29 percent increase in service levels to date in 2024 compared to 2023. Utilization data from the Feeding NY food bank network shows a nearly 70 percent increase in people served over the last five years from 2019 to 2024. Overall, trends show a significant increase in demand for emergency food.^{xxviii}

Emergency providers must purchase more food to meet demand, but their expenses extend far beyond food costs. Resources to support infrastructure and operations are critical for continued operation, including, but not limited to staffing, logistics, aggregation, processing, storage, packaging, distribution, and marketing facilities.

Continued technical assistance and collaboration are essential for front-line community-based food providers, including resources that address clients’ nutritional needs and gaps in food access. The work group recommends streamlining pathways that connect the emergency food network to New York State resources including information, funding, farmers, and food recovery partners.

Following is an overview of progress on 2023 recommendations:

- **Create a document that outlines funding and support for food assistance organizations:** A document is in development by AGM to outline all relevant funding sources and programs to strengthen food assistance networks (i.e., food banks, food pantries, and other organizations providing food to people in need). The Council regularly encourages the sharing of resources between entities and has formalized a monthly email outreach to consolidate timely and relevant information for distribution to stakeholders.
- **Encourage collaboration between the state and stakeholders to improve outreach:** To improve prospective grantees' understanding of funding opportunities and how to apply, AGM has implemented increased communication strategies around funding opportunities and expanded webinar training sessions and office hours for applicants and grantees. Additional effort is needed in this area, such as streamlining communications via the AGM website and leveraging the Council network of agencies and partners to reach relevant contacts.
- **Create an interactive webpage connecting food pantries with New York producers:** The New York State Grown & Certified^{xxxix} program assures consumers that the food they are buying is local and produced to a higher standard by requiring participating producers to adopt food safety standards and enroll in an environmental management program. AGM has produced a New York Products for Institutional Buyers^{xxx} guide that helps buyers understand which products are available throughout the year, depending on harvest time, and suggests how products might be featured on a menu. Resources are highlighted on the AGM Business Development page.^{xxxi}
- **Collaborate with DEC to increase food recovery and donation with a focus on safety:** In October 2024, DEC announced \$1.25 million in new grant funding via the Local Emergency Food Relief Equipment Grant Program^{xxxii} to assist CBOs with the purchase of equipment that will expand transportation and cold storage of food as well as emergency generators to make sure food is not wasted when it is needed most. New York State's nation-leading food donation and food scraps recycling programs help reduce waste and climate-altering emissions caused by landfilling. The work group also conducted outreach and produced resources to assist with increasing food recovery and donation.

A list of recommendations for 2024 is provided later in this report as a roadmap for future work.

Food Access Programs Work Group Activities

Group Lead: *Krista Hesdorfer, Hunger Solutions New York*

Group Goal: *Leverage public dollars to address the needs of food insecure people across the state.*

The Food Access Programs Work Group focused on ways New York can expand access to federal nutrition assistance programs, including SNAP, WIC, Summer EBT, and school meals. These programs provide sustainable, federally funded food access that alleviates hunger and supports local economies. New York has made impactful investments to increase awareness and participation across the programs, including state funding for SNAP outreach and application assistance, administrative funding for Summer EBT, and a state subsidy to expand free school meals. The work group discussed ways to build on these efforts and alleviate remaining barriers to program participation so New York can fully leverage federal nutrition assistance resources.

In 2024, New York launched Summer EBT, a new permanent federal nutrition program that provided \$120 per summer in EBT food benefits for eligible low-income children.^{xxxiii} In the program's inaugural

year, OTDA successfully distributed more than \$250 million in EBT benefits to children across the state. Work group members noted the positive impacts of these benefits and discussed ways to improve the program in future years, including expanded outreach efforts, improvements to resource translations, and additional customer service resources. The work group recommends OTDA program administrators seek feedback from parents and advocates regarding the rollout of Summer EBT to inform plans for future years.

Throughout the 2023-2024 school year, New York rolled out an expansion of the federal Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), which allows eligible high-poverty schools to provide free school breakfast and lunch to all students. According to initial estimates from SED, an estimated 1,400 additional schools are now using CEP to provide universal free school meals. In the first six months of the expansion, SED administrators reported a 12 percent increase in school meal participation, with an additional 18 million lunches and 10 million breakfasts reaching New York students.

Given the success of this expansion in improving children's meal access, the state should consider extending universal free school meals to all New York schools participating in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program. Providing universal school meals alleviates food insecurity, supports learning, and bolsters children's mental and physical health, all while saving families an estimated \$165 per month per child in food costs. The work group recommends proactive outreach and technical assistance to help schools implement additional opportunities to improve meal access, such as starting or expanding summer meal programs, after school meals, and Breakfast After the Bell.

The work group also discussed the importance of strong SNAP participation. SNAP is the largest federal nutrition program, and it provides streamlined eligibility for other programs such as WIC, Summer EBT, and free school meals. Work group members noted a need for additional SNAP outreach and application assistance, particularly for seniors and people in rural communities. Other recommendations included streamlining applications and benefits across programs so families can more easily access and use all the federal benefits programs for which they are eligible.

Following is an overview of progress on 2023 recommendations:

- **Optimize existing federal nutrition program resources and secure more as needed:**
In 2024, New York sustained previous investments in SNAP outreach and school meals. Lawmakers also provided administrative funding to support the launch of Summer EBT. The work group recommends exploring additional investments to build on the success of these programs and ensure the programs can match the pace of the growing issue.
- **Develop collaborative outreach campaigns to increase awareness of federal programs:**
During the launch of Summer EBT, OTDA collaborated with advocates and state agencies to raise awareness of the program. OTDA also launched the Restaurant Meals Program, which allows some SNAP households to purchase prepared meals from participating restaurants in the case they cannot prepare meals themselves. The work group recommends similar interagency and cross-sector outreach for all nutrition programs.
- **Improve technology to streamline access and enrollment in federal nutrition programs:**
New York's Integrated Eligibility System (IES) is in development to provide a more seamless, integrated, "no-wrong-door" approach to application and enrollment for health and human services benefits. The work group met with OTDA in 2024 to receive an update and offer feedback toward launching system components in phases.

- **Maximize existing authority to expand access to federal nutrition programs:** New York continues to explore opportunities to maximize existing resources to streamline access to federal nutrition programs, including leveraging all available county waivers and flexibility in program implementation to reach a variety of stakeholders in need.

A list of recommendations for 2024 is provided later in this report as a roadmap for future work.

Council Recommendations

General meetings and work group discussions revealed some common themes for the development of effective food policy in New York. To best serve all stakeholders, the Council recommends that decision-makers prioritize these themes when developing policy, funding opportunities, and standard operating procedures across state programming.

1. **Efficiency:** Find opportunities for short-term improvements in standard operating procedures.
2. **Transparency:** Clearly explain and communicate about opportunities for funding and benefits.
3. **Collaboration:** Identify opportunities for collaboration across state agencies and stakeholders.
4. **Engagement:** Continue stakeholder engagement and integrate into process improvement.
5. **Research:** Conduct objective needs assessments to identify gaps in funding and programs.
6. **Technology:** Integrate new technology to automate processes and improve program delivery.

Each work group discussed actionable next steps for achieving the Council goals and agreed on the recommendations on the following pages. Context is given below each recommendation to frame the intent. Work groups will meet in 2025 to develop action plans for each recommendation and report on progress by January 30, 2026.

Continued partnership among members of the Council, state agencies, and policy makers will be important to advance these recommendations in 2025. Thank you in advance for your collaboration.

Economic Vitality Work Group Recommendations

Group Lead: Julie Suarez, Cornell University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

Group Goal: Ensure New York farmers are thriving and can sustain food production long-term.

1	<p>Address issues with New York farmer incentive programs so that the implementation of these programs matches their intent to support the industry.</p> <p><i>The Council recommends convening farmer stakeholders to address issues with programs such as overtime tax credits, low-interest housing loans, and grants that are in effect but not fully addressing industry needs.</i></p>
2	<p>Partner with state agencies to test the viability of proposed bid modifications that could streamline the procurement of New York produce and food products.</p> <p><i>The Council supports launching a pilot program with one or more state agencies to test proposed modifications to the procurement bidding process, including the use of Cornell's True Cost of Food Calculator and Good Food Purchasing, which could increase procurement of New York grown and produced foods.</i></p>
3	<p>Expand existing food supply chain asset mapping to link farmers and suppliers with buyers serving food access programs.</p> <p><i>To encourage collaboration and fully leverage all investments in New York agriculture and food production, the Council will work with stakeholders to centralize various food system asset mapping initiatives.</i></p>
4	<p>Create and implement a comprehensive plan to increase food processing in New York, including new incentives, policies, and partnerships to meet demand for New York products.</p> <p><i>The Council identified that it would be helpful to examine the incentives and attractiveness of doing business in New York State against those of other states in the Northeast region so that New York can be more competitive, reduce food waste, create jobs, and increase revenue for agriculture and marketing economies statewide.</i></p>
5	<p>Contribute to New York's climate change mitigation plans with a special focus on the impacts on food supply and food security.</p> <p><i>New York State has launched several programs to address climate change. The Council will assess these efforts and provide feedback to highlight the needs of the agricultural community and the impacts on food security.</i></p>

Food as Medicine Work Group Recommendations

Group Lead: Ellie Wilson, MS, RDN, CDN, Price Chopper & Market32 Supermarkets

Group Goal: Improve the nutritional quality of foods provided to people in need.

6	<p>Develop a resource for food processors to evaluate whether their products could meet Food as Medicine nutritional standards.</p> <p><i>Using the HPNAP “My Plate” standards as a baseline, the Council will create a chart of various Food as Medicine nutritional standards to demonstrate how food producers could alter their product formulations to meet a range of standards. The goal is to drive product development, transparency, and access to products that can serve multiple supply chains.</i></p>
7	<p>Connect food scientists with food processors to examine product formulations and increase the supply of eligible Food as Medicine products.</p> <p><i>Cornell CALS and AGM will partner on the “AgriTech on the Road” initiative to expand the capacity of small to mid-sized food processors. The Council will collaborate to leverage this program as an opportunity to adjust product formulations to meet various Food as Medicine nutritional standards. The Council recommends including Registered Dietitian Nutritionists in the process to facilitate and validate links to Food as Medicine supply chains.</i></p>
8	<p>Collaborate with food retailers to improve consumer marketing of and education about various Food as Medicine eligible products.</p> <p><i>The goal of this recommendation is to meet consumers where they are regularly shopping at retailers across New York. The Council will collaborate with retailers to evaluate how retailers can promote HPNAP “My Plate” standards and other nationally recognized Food as Medicine standards via labeling and marketing, both in person and via online shopping.</i></p>
9	<p>Identify and mitigate obstacles for emergency feeding programs to procure culturally appropriate and religiously required foods such as Kosher and Halal.</p> <p><i>With many areas of the state providing a safe harbor to immigrants, the Council will examine how to ensure foods provided via public assistance are both nutritionally valuable and culturally relevant. A specific focus will be placed on sourcing Kosher and Halal products.</i></p>

Food Assistance Networks Work Group Recommendations

Group Lead: *Natasha Pernicka, Alliance for a Hunger Free NY, Food Pantries for the Capital District*

Group Goal: *Strengthen connections between supply chains and organizations helping people in need.*

10	<p>Support New York’s food assistance networks by identifying and mitigating funding obstacles and gaps that weaken the system’s resilience.</p> <p><i>As the 1115 Waiver is implemented, the Council recommends consistent communication with food assistance organizations to address front line issues as they arise, including emergency assistance to organizations struggling to bridge funding gaps. Funding for Nourish New York and HPNAP is recommended at \$75 million for each program.</i></p>
11	<p>Develop a resource for food assistance networks to highlight the benefits, best practices, and incentives for receiving recovered or donated food.</p> <p><i>To complement New York’s food recovery and donation incentive programs, the Council will develop standardized resources and best practices that food assistance organizations can use to evaluate the quality and safety of donations at the time of delivery.</i></p>
12	<p>Optimize partnerships with food banks, food pantries, and food policy councils to streamline communication about state programs and funding.</p> <p><i>NYS Council coordinators will establish regular email communication to members and affiliates, including relevant updates, funding opportunities, and policy updates that can be shared with regional stakeholders. This effort leverages the network to share information.</i></p>
13	<p>Combine multi-source survey data to identify critical issues within the food assistance network and integrate this information in forthcoming Council reports.</p> <p><i>Policies and programs meant to solve hunger can only be successful if the network of organizations within the system is optimized. The Council will centralize survey data from state agencies and partners to evaluate the state of the food assistance network. This evaluation will inform future recommendations to strengthen the network.</i></p>
14	<p>Adjust New York State policy to allow patrons of food banks and food pantries to receive assistance without signing a document attesting to their low income.</p> <p><i>Some of the most vulnerable New Yorkers would rather go hungry than sign a form that could place them at risk. Front line service providers should be able to leverage state resources to triage real-time issues without restriction.</i></p>

Food Access Programs Work Group Recommendations

Group Lead: Krista Hesdorfer, Hunger Solutions New York

Group Goal: Leverage public dollars to address the needs of food insecure people across the state.

15	<p>Significantly increase state funding to expand the availability of food access navigators who will help enroll eligible individuals in federal benefit programs.</p> <p><i>The Council recommends providing people in need of food assistance with a more direct and customized path to benefits enrollment. Funding for frontline service providers to hire additional food access navigators will help people get the help they need, both before and during the launch of New York State’s Integrated Eligibility System (IES).</i></p>
16	<p>Provide free school meals to all students attending New York schools participating in the National School Breakfast and Lunch Programs.</p> <p><i>Universal school meals may have a significant impact on the state budget, but the return on this investment will certainly outweigh the cost. The Council will report on the societal and economic benefits associated with this recommendation, including a path toward adoption. This will particularly aid suburban and rural school districts currently ineligible to benefit from the federal Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).</i></p>
17	<p>Expand state and nonprofit partnerships to significantly increase Summer EBT applications and utilization during the program’s second year in 2025.</p> <p><i>The collection of data and feedback from 2024 Summer EBT is in progress as of this report. Once this data has been fully received, the Council will analyze the program and propose a path toward leveraging the Council network for improved program outreach.</i></p>
18	<p>Create a process map as an educational tool to highlight the needs and challenges of individuals who may be eligible for federal nutrition assistance benefits.</p> <p><i>Food assistance providers across the state have identified various challenges and obstacles to addressing hunger, including an acknowledgement of the differing needs of eligible individuals. As a communications tool, the Council will create a process map to visualize these challenges and move toward specific solutions to serve each user group.</i></p>
19	<p>Create a state-funded SNAP program that ensures all income-eligible New Yorkers, regardless of immigration status, receive a monthly food assistance benefit.</p> <p><i>Despite contributing over \$3 billion per year in state and local taxes, federal law currently excludes over 800,000 New Yorkers from SNAP solely due to their immigration status. Many others are subjected to an arbitrary five-year waiting period. New York’s Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council (CPRAC) is considering a state-funded food benefit and the Council supports this recommendation. The Council also recommends increasing SNAP benefits to at least \$100 per month.</i></p>

Appendix

2024 Council Members and Affiliates

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

Name	Affiliation
Richard A. Ball, Commissioner*	Department of Agriculture and Markets
Kristine Ellsworth, Environmental Engineer	Department of Environmental Conservation
Amy Gildemeister, Associate Director of Nutrition Policy and Partnership on behalf of James McDonald, Commissioner*	Department of Health
Laura Gonzalez-Murphy, Executive Director	Department of State, Office for New Americans
Viviana DeCohen, Commissioner	Department of Veterans' Services
Allison Stark, Director, Industry Development on behalf of Hope Knight, Commissioner*	Empire State Development
Greg Olsen, Acting Director*	Office for the Aging
Dr. DaMia Harris-Madden, Commissioner	Office of Children and Family Services
Jeannette Moy, Commissioner Nicholas Barber, Food Distribution Director Gabrielle Viens, Food Distribution Administrator	Office of General Services
Ann Sullivan, Commissioner Merrill Rotter, Medical Director	Office of Mental Health
Susan Zimet, Food and Anti-Hunger Policy Coordinator on behalf of Barbara C. Guinn, Commissioner*	Office of Temporary Disability Assistance
Gemma Rinefierd, Assistant Commissioner for Student Support Services on behalf of Betty A. Rosa, Commissioner*	State Education Department
Kristen McManus, Associate State Director	American Association of Retired Persons
Steve Terzo, Director of Business Development*	American Dairy Association and Dairy Council

Name	Affiliation
Allison DeHoney, Executive Director	Buffalo Go Green
Jerome Nathaniel, Director, Policy & Government Relations*	City Harvest
Justin Rogers, Executive Director*	Cornell Cooperative Extension Niagara County
Angela Odoms Young, Associate Professor Tashara Leak, Associate Professor	Cornell University
Julie Suarez, Associate Dean for Land Grant Affairs*	Cornell University College of Agriculture & Life Sciences
Jeff Crist, Owner	Crist Brothers Orchards
Tessa Edick, Founder & Board Chair	FarmOn! Foundation
Dan Egan, Executive Director	Feeding NYS
Karen Erren, President and CEO*	Feeding Westchester
Joshua McGuire, Program Director: Double Up Food Bucks	Field and Fork Network
Leslie Gordon, President & CEO* Camesha Grant, Vice President	Food Bank for NYC
Mark Bordeau, President & CEO	Food Bank of the Southern Tier
Natasha Pernicka, Executive Director*	Food Pantries for the Capital District The Alliance for a Hunger Free New York
Judiann Carmack-Fayyaz, Executive Director*	FoodLab at Stony Brook University
Mitch Gruber, Chief Programs Officer*	Foodlink
Kathleen Finlay, President	Glynwood Center for Regional Food and Farming
Fran Barrett, NYS Interagency Coordinator for Nonprofit Organizations	Governor’s Office

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Name	Affiliation
Richard de Graff, Owner	Grindstone Farm
Marcel Van Ooyen, President & CEO*	Grow NYC
Kate Van Tassel, Director of Special Projects	Homes & Community Renewal
Joel Berg, CEO*	Hunger Free America
Krista Hesdorfer, Director of Public Affairs on behalf of Andres Vives, Executive Director*	Hunger Solutions New York
Randi Shubin Dresner, President & CEO	Island Harvest Food Bank
Dickran Jebejian, Director of Policy, on behalf of David Greenfield, CEO	Met Council
Larry Tse, Farm Organizer	National Young Farmers Coalition & Choy Commons
Renee St. Jacques, Senior Associate Director of Public Policy and Promotion & Education* Jeff Williams, Director of Public Policy	New York Farm Bureau
Julia McCarthy, Senior Program Officer Liz Ward, Program Assistant	New York Health Foundation
Caitlin Lazarski, Director of School Nutrition	New York School Nutrition Association
Rachel Sabella, Director	No Kid Hungry New York
Stephen O'Brien, Director of Strategic Partnerships and Policy*	NYC Department of Education, School Fund
Ellie Wilson, Manager, Lifestyles and Wellness*	Price Chopper Supermarkets
Karen Washington, Co-Owner/Farmer	Rise & Root Farm
Sue Jaffe, Owner*	Snowdance Farms
Dr. Melony Samuels, CEO & Founder*	The Campaign Against Hunger
Grace C. Bonilla, President & CEO	United Way of NYC

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