

SETTING THE TABLE:

NYC'S RESEARCH FRAMEWORK TO ENHANCE
FOOD AFFORDABILITY AND ACCESS



NYC
Food Policy

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Food is the foundation of health and well-being. Yet food insecurity is rising in New York City and across the nation. High inflation and competing economic constraints force New Yorkers to make tough decisions between paying for groceries, housing, transportation, health care, and other essentials – limiting their ability to thrive. In addition, food retail shifts and consumer trends are changing how businesses operate and how people feed themselves, making it important to re-evaluate food affordability and access in New York City.

The Mayor's Office of Food Policy (MOFP) strives to make New York City more affordable for the families that call the city home and to ensure that all New Yorkers enjoy long, healthy lives. To create impactful solutions, it is critical to identify systemic barriers to food affordability and access and other factors that hinder New Yorkers' ability to purchase healthy food.

This research framework identifies priorities and serves as a coordination instrument between City agencies and external partners with overlapping missions so that evidence-based solutions to the problem of food affordability and access can be determined. It focuses on three critical areas: food pricing, food retail, and food choice and behaviors.

Advancing Food Equity and Chronic Disease Prevention in NYC

In 2021, MOFP published Food Forward NYC, a comprehensive 10-year food policy plan, outlining the City's vision to reach a more equitable, sustainable, and healthy food system by 2031. Goal 1 of Food Forward NYC emphasizes the importance of equity and choice, aiming to ensure that **“All New Yorkers have multiple ways to access healthy, affordable, and culturally appropriate food.”** Goal 5 expresses our commitment to **“Support the systems and knowledge to implement the 10-year food policy plan,”** which includes data transparency and collaborative engagement with stakeholders through knowledge sharing and collective learning to inform food-policy decisions.

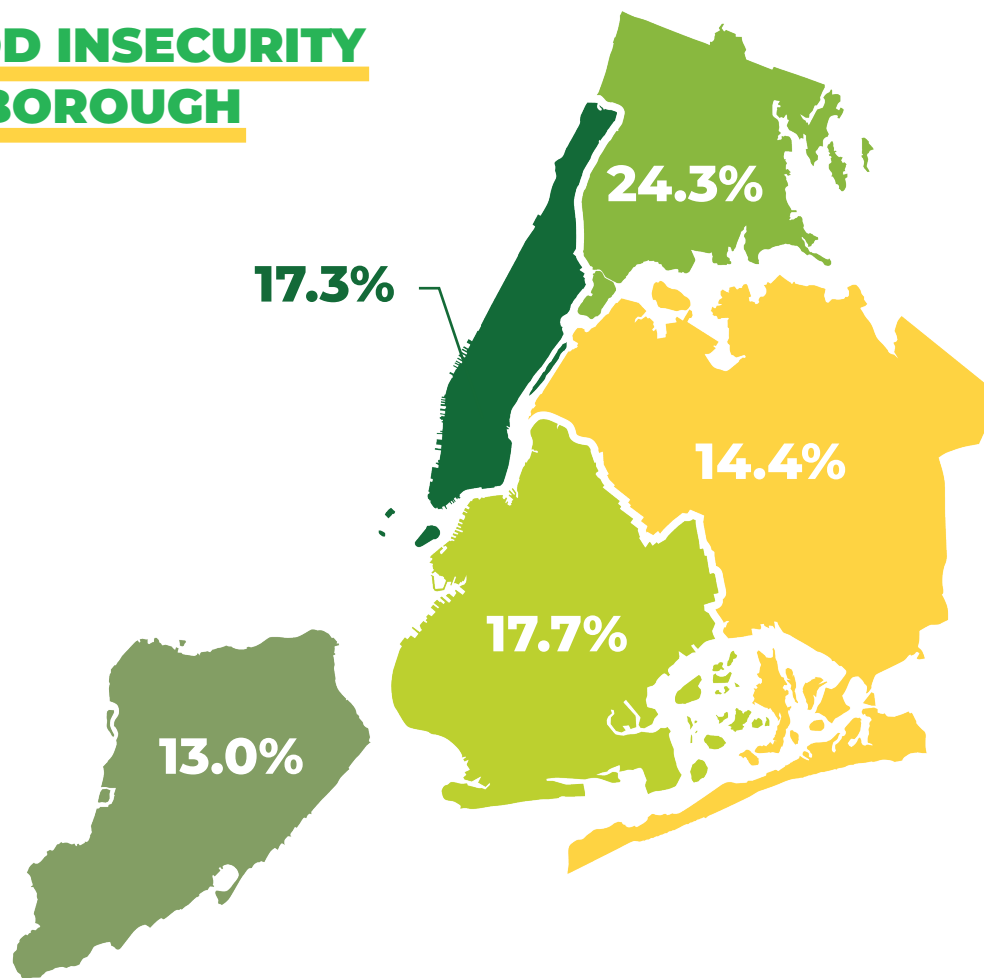
As we approach the halfway point of this 10-year plan, this research framework solidifies our commitment to improving food access for all New Yorkers and addressing steep inequities through meaningful partnerships and focused collaboration.

MOFP works in close coordination with the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYC Health Department) to ensure that New York City's food policies align with broader public health goals. In November 2023, the NYC Health Department launched [HealthyNYC](#), the City's vision for increasing life expectancy to 83 years of age for all New Yorkers by 2030 by addressing key drivers to premature mortality. Building on HealthyNYC, in January 2025, the NYC Health Department released [“Addressing Unacceptable Inequities: A Chronic Disease Strategy for New York City,”](#) the Citywide plan to specifically address chronic disease by using three approaches: meeting material needs, addressing commercial determinants of health, and promoting opportunities for healthy living. This research framework is part of the Strategy's efforts to improve New Yorkers' access to resources, expand nutrition security, and support healthy food consumption.

Food Insecurity in New York City

Across New York City, **17.5% of residents** – **over 1.5 million New Yorkers** – experienced food insecurity in 2023, surpassing the rising nationwide rate of 14.3%.¹ Rates vary by borough, with the Bronx experiencing the highest level of food insecurity.²

FOOD INSECURITY BY BOROUGH



In addition to geography, certain factors, including but not limited to race and ethnicity, and household composition influence risk for food insecurity. For example, in New York City, **Black, Asian, and Latino adults are two to three times more likely** to be at risk for food insecurity than their White counterparts.³ **48% of households with children** are at risk of food insecurity compared to 35% of households without children.⁴ Efforts to combat food insecurity must therefore incorporate an equity lens to ensure all New Yorkers have reliable access to healthy, affordable food.



Framework Development

PREVIOUS PROJECTS:

The Healthy Food Retail Networking Group (2013–2015) united 40+ organizations, including NYC Health Department and CUNY, to improve food access at brick-and-mortar retailers. As food access evolves, it's clear that retail alone isn't enough to overcome cost barriers. This research agenda promotes a broader analysis of the food system and the factors shaping access to healthy food.

MOFP convened key stakeholders from Department of City Planning, Mayor's Office of Equity and Racial Justice, Department of Homeless Services, Department of Consumer and Worker Protection, NYC Health Department, NYC Department of Social Services - Human Resources Administration (DSS-HRA), Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity, New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, Department of City Planning, NYC Economic Development Corporation, Small Business Services - Business Express Service Team (BEST), Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy at the Teachers College of Columbia University, CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute, Grow NYC, BMCC Advocacy and Resource Center, Urban Health Plan, City Harvest, and West Side Campaign Against Hunger.

This group of experts came together on a monthly basis from June to December 2024, utilizing their unique expertise to identify research priorities that will deepen the City's knowledge of New Yorkers' food affordability, retail environments, and choice and behaviors. Additional experts and practitioners like independent grocery stores operators, food economists, and policy advocates were consulted to broaden the group's understanding of the food system, environment, and resident experience, fostering collaborative learning and curiosity to develop the research questions presented here. In addition to workgroup meetings, the group's Advisory Committee, which included representatives from the NYC Health Department, CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute, New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, and DSS-HRA, worked alongside MOFP to provide strategic direction for following meetings and the trajectory of the workgroup.

Charting the Path to Research and Understanding

The pathway forward must consider the various social and economic factors that impact food affordability and access among New Yorkers.

Within the next four years, MOFP's anticipated impacts through convening this workgroup and collaboratively implementing the prioritized research opportunities are to:

- Use the research agenda as a coordination tool between City agencies with overlapping mission and priorities,
- Support mutually beneficial partnerships between NYC government and academic institutions, public health foundations, food advocates, and other partners within and beyond NYC, and
- Creatively use existing resources to foster knowledge sharing and continuous learning about pervasive problems that affect New Yorkers' ability to feed themselves.



Food Pricing

U.S. households are spending more of their incomes on food in the face of rising food costs. From 2019 to 2023, food prices rose by 25%. In 2023, the typical U.S. household spent \$75 per person per week on food, \$5 more than the previous year, and \$25 more than pre-pandemic 2019.^{5,6} Grocery prices are continuing to rise in 2025 – with the most volatile increase in egg prices due to the continued bird flu outbreak, projected to climb 41.1%.⁷ And food prices are expected to remain high due to tariffs, labor shortages, and supply chain disruptions due to agriculture policies as well as impacts of climate change and severe weather.

As NYC takes action to make the city a more affordable place to raise a family, it is important to understand households' food expenditures and what this means for their overall budgets.

- 1. Grocery Costs and Expenditures:** How much do New Yorkers spend on groceries? What is the true cost of groceries in NYC among New Yorkers and how does it compare to the USDA's Thrifty Food Plan?
- 2. Grocery Budgets:** How much of a household's budget is dedicated to food? What city resources or programs directly or indirectly support New Yorkers stretch their food dollars?
- 3. Food Security Programs' Value:** What is the monetary value of federal and city food security programs offered to New Yorkers? Are there other cost-effective ways to increase food security of New Yorkers?
- 4. Geographic Variability of Prices:** Food prices tend to vary across neighborhoods in the city. Which neighborhoods are the least and most affordable to grocery shop in? How does this interplay with demographics and types of food retail stores?

Food Retail

The food retail landscape in NYC comprises a wide range of outlets, from grocery stores and farmers' markets to corner stores and mobile food vendors like Green Carts. It also includes online retail, which has seen significant market growth since 2020.⁸ These retail spaces are crucial access points for fresh, nutritious, and affordable food. However, inequities persist, with several neighborhoods across the city often having limited access to full-service grocery stores – many of which are predominately Black, Latino, and low-income neighborhoods.⁹

Between 2005 and 2015, the city lost around 8% of family-owned small grocery stores, placing additional strain on food access, likely the result of competition, high costs of business, and other related factors.¹⁰ NYC is committed to exploring local policy solutions that support food retail viability for existing and new actors of all sizes, ownership structure, and business models. This focus area delves into the geographical distribution of retail food outlets, the factors driving business decisions, and the impact of evolving retail trends, including online grocery services.



PREVIOUS PROJECTS:

In 2016, NYC Economic Development Corporation and Mayor's Office of Recovery and Resiliency studied [the last-mile food distribution system](#) that feeds New York City. This report highlights New York City's reliance on truck-based transportation for food distribution, which could face disruptions during extreme events. It emphasizes the importance of food distribution jobs and the growing impact of online grocery shopping, which requires more advanced logistics. The study detailed the city's food system and anticipated supply chain changes to inform policies aimed at strengthening its resilience, and MOFP plans to revisit this report to forecast future trends and improve preparedness.

1. **Food Retail Landscape:** Which areas of the city are most frequented for grocery shopping and which are least visited? What factors contribute to this, and what measures, if any, could enhance equitable grocery access across the city?
2. **City Assets and Food Access:** How can city-owned assets be better deployed to support food retail businesses and increase food access across NYC, while taking into account residents' competing needs beyond food, such as housing?
3. **Food Retail Access:** Which areas of the city currently have low supermarket access? Which neighborhoods have the highest need for food retail expansion based on current resident access to supermarkets?
4. **FRESH Impact and Expansion:** Where have FRESH zoning and tax incentives been effective in expanding supermarket access? What strategies, such as technical support and program promotion, could improve retailer feasibility and access to the program?
5. **Online Food Retail and Distribution:** How is the increasing market share of online grocery shopping reshaping the face of brick-and-mortar food retail, warehousing, and cold storage? What opportunities and challenges does this present in increasing food access?



PREVIOUS PROJECTS:



[The Food Environment Equity Dashboard for NYC \(FEED-NYC\)](#)

visualized several key aspects of food insecurity and access in NYC. Led by CUNY SPH researchers, the dashboard includes research on food price variation offered by an independent grocer with locations citywide; food price variation across multiple grocers; perceptions of grocery store chain prices, quality, product selection, ambience, and marketing by neighborhood poverty level and distance traveled to grocery stores; and marketing by neighborhood poverty level and distance traveled to grocery stores.

Food Choice & Behaviors

Food choice and behaviors highlight the decisions individuals and households make when purchasing, preparing, and consuming food. These behaviors are influenced by factors such as proximity to and quality of food in retail outlets, income and other financial stressors, transportation modes and availability, food product marketing, cultural preferences and religious diets, cooking skills and access to equipment, and time. Additionally, the growth of online grocery shopping plays a role in shaping how New Yorkers meet their food needs. By understanding these choices and behaviors, the city can better design programs and policies to support equitable access to nutritious and preferred foods.

In urban areas throughout New York State, food insecure New Yorkers face a range of barriers to accessing food, with transportation and cost reported as top challenges. Urban residents also report barriers to cooking at home including time constraints, limited cooking equipment, storage space, and preparation and cooking skills.¹¹

- 1. Transportation: What modes of transportation do New Yorkers use to travel to grocery stores and what is their travel time based on their home and/or work zip code? What role can transportation play in increasing food access?**
- 2. Online Food Retail Use: What share of New Yorkers' grocery purchases are made online versus in-store? How can online grocery shopping improve accessibility and affordability?**
- 3. Marketing of Food and Beverage Products: What models of healthy food promotion are most successful and how can they be leveraged to influence food behavior of New Yorkers?**
- 4. Food Away From Home: As U.S. households are spending more of their income on food away from home, how can the City support the healthiest choice being the easiest and most affordable choice for take-out meals?**

From Insight to Action

New York City is dedicated to improving access to healthy, affordable food for all New Yorkers. Addressing the complex barriers to nutritious, culturally relevant food requires urgent action and collaboration.

MOFP seeks to align priorities across City agencies to explore these challenges, focusing on chronic disease prevention and economic well-being with a focus on equity and inclusion. We call on agencies to strengthen their data transparency, research engagement, and information sharing to facilitate engagement with policymakers, academic institutions, public health foundations, food advocates, and other partners.

By working together, we can build the evidence needed to drive impactful food access initiatives, support vulnerable New Yorkers, and cement the City's leadership in food security and public health. We encourage interested researchers to use this agenda as a catalyst for deepening our understanding of the NYC's food system and identify solutions that make healthy food accessible to all.



Appendix

How New York City is working to improve affordability and access

The City has launched several initiatives to increase affordability and alleviate financial burdens for households and communities most impacted by limited economic means as well as for businesses serving or aspiring to serve healthy, affordable foods to underserved communities.

[City of Yes for Housing Opportunity](#): a zoning reform policy aiming to address the housing crisis by building additional safe, affordable housing units in every NYC neighborhood which can help reduce financial stress on rent burdened New Yorkers and increase their budgets for other needs, such as groceries.

[Money in Your Pocket](#): a public campaign to inform and screen New Yorkers for over 70 city, state, and federal programs to make the city more affordable for them.¹² Benefits range from tax credits and financial empowerment, to housing, transportation – including the [Fair Fares](#) program which provides New Yorkers with low incomes a 50% discount on subway and bus fares – as well as health and food.

[Food Retail Expansion to Support Health \(FRESH\) Program](#): zoning and tax benefits to developers to incentivize creation of grocery stores in areas with limited supermarket access. Today, FRESH stores are a half mile from over 1 million New Yorkers, bringing groceries within walking distance.¹³

[Green Carts](#): mobile food carts offering fresh produce for purchase in New York City neighborhoods with limited access to healthy foods.

[Get the Good Stuff](#): a program providing NYC SNAP participants with free fresh produce and beans at certain NYC supermarkets. For every dollar spent using SNAP on eligible fruits, vegetables and beans, SNAP participants receive a matching dollar in reward points (up to \$10 per day) that can be used for the next purchase of eligible produce.

[Health Bucks](#): \$2 coupons received by SNAP participants and other NYC residents through participation in nutrition education and other health-related activities, used to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables at all NYC farmers markets.

[Groceries 2 Go](#): a program providing eligible New Yorkers with monthly credits to purchase SNAP-eligible groceries for delivery or pickup. These credits can also be used to pay for service fees, tips and delivery.

[Community Food Connection](#): a program providing funding to about [700 community kitchens and food pantries citywide](#).

[Shop Healthy NYC!](#): a program working with food retailers, suppliers, distributors and local communities to increase access to healthy foods in neighborhoods with limited healthy food access and high rates of diet-related diseases.

[Food Delivery Worker Minimum Pay Rate](#): first-in-the-nation rule to implement minimum pay rates for app-based restaurant delivery workers, boosting workers' pay rate from an average of \$7.09/hour to an average of \$21.44 per hour as of April 1, 2025.

In addition to City programs and initiatives, federal nutrition programs administered by New York State boost access to food and increase the purchasing power of households experiencing food insecurity or nutrition insecurity:

[Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\)](#): food benefits in the form of monthly allotments for households to purchase groceries at participating SNAP retailers. In 2024, over 1.8 million NYC residents received SNAP benefits.¹⁴ In CY2024, over \$5 billion dollars' worth of SNAP benefits were issued to clients in the five boroughs and NYC's most recent Program Access Index (PAI) score is 94.9% (PAI is a metric developed by USDA that's calculated by dividing the average monthly SNAP caseload over the number of residents living below 125% of the poverty line).

[The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children \(WIC\)](#): services include providing supplemental foods biweekly to participants that are deemed at nutritional risk. On average in Fiscal Year 2024, there were over 233,000 WIC participants in NYC.¹⁵

[New York State Restaurant Meals Program](#): allows people with disabilities, people experiencing homelessness and older adults to use their SNAP benefits to purchase prepared meals at participating restaurants, currently rolling out at restaurants in NYC.

The City has been effective in proposing solutions for food access issues as defined over the years. Our approaches must continue to evolve as our understanding of food access, barriers, and opportunities of influence change so we can best meet need.

New York State is investing in food retail businesses to support improvements in resident access to healthy and affordable foods and economic resiliency of New York State farmers, producers and retailers:

[New York State Food Access Expansion Grant](#): The program seeks to improve food access for New Yorkers in areas lacking grocery stores and affordable, healthy food options. It will provide funding for infrastructure to support the growth of supermarkets, food cooperatives, permanent farm stands, and other retail food outlets in underserved areas, while also boosting market opportunities for New York farmers. Awardees will be announced Spring 2025.

[New York State Farmers' Market Resiliency Grant Program](#): The program will fund projects designed to strengthen the resilience of the current food system through farmers' markets. This includes efforts to develop and improve farmers' market infrastructure, online platforms, marketing and outreach, and delivery services throughout the state.

Endnotes

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A warm, indoor scene featuring a woman with curly hair and a patterned top on the left, smiling. In the center and right are two young girls with curly hair, wearing striped shirts, focused on preparing food. A bunch of green leafy vegetables is visible in the bottom right corner. The background shows a bright window with white frames and light-colored curtains.

ERIC ADAMS
MAYOR

KATE MACKENZIE, MS, RD
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
NYC MAYOR'S OFFICE OF FOOD POLICY

NYC Delivering for you.
Every day. Everywhere.