



FOOD FOR THE FUTURE

INTRODUCTION

The Food Systems Network NYC is a not-for-profit, membership organization dedicated to helping ensure the health and well-being of New York City residents through universal access to wholesome, nutritious, safe food and to supporting the viability of our regional farm and food economy.

PlaNYC 2030, the City of New York’s plan to meet the growth, infrastructure, and environmental challenges of the coming decades is an extraordinary testament to the belief that our city will remain one of the truly great cities in the world. PlaNYC focuses “on the physical city, and its possibilities to unleash opportunity.” Included in the plan are suitably ambitious goals regarding Air, Water, Land, Housing, Transportation, Energy, and the Environment. But noticeably absent from the plan is the impact of Food on our city.

Cities all over the country, including San Francisco, Santa Monica, and Oakland in California and Portland in Oregon have addressed the role of their food systems in their sustainability plans. Officials in those cities recognize that agriculture and food processing, distribution, consumption, and disposal all impact a city’s economy, public health, transportation systems, air and water quality, and the environment in general.

New York City’s residents are its most valuable resource. Their good health and well-being will enable them to contribute to the City’s future greatness, or not. As every resident is entitled to breathing clean air and drinking pure water, so is each entitled to eat good food that is wholesome, nutritious, and safe.

In many communities around the City, the food we eat is making us sick. Residents in many “food insecure” communities suffer high incidences of obesity and food-related illnesses - diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and cancer. According to a survey by the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, the ten New York City neighborhoods with the highest mortality rates from diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and cancer are in food deserts, areas with less than average access to fresh food outlets. The survey noted that as many as 25 percent of sampled residents reported that they did not have a single serving of fresh fruit or vegetables on the day preceding the survey.¹ Also, according to the City’s Human Resources Administration, more

¹ NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. www.nyc.gov/health

than 1.7 million of New York City's residents depend on Food Stamps buy food for themselves and their families. This number, steadily increasing since 2008, mirrors the 20.8 percent increase in the amount of food provided by emergency food providers between 2008 and 2009, according to the NYC Coalition Against Hunger.ⁱⁱ

New York City continues to suffer high unemployment rates from the lingering recession: over 9 percent in the general population, 15.3 percent among black residents and 13.3 percent among Hispanic residents.ⁱⁱⁱ Many economists expect that our nation's and our city's pace of recovery to be slow, and that significant job creation, enough to reach pre-recession employment levels, will take years. Encouraging and supporting regional food production along with processing and distribution businesses is an important key to long-term economic and environmental sustainability and job growth, and will be an effective means to prevent and address hunger and food-related illnesses affecting our city's residents.

According to the American Farmland Trust, New York has lost 613,500 acres of farmland to development between 1997 and 2007.^{iv} While our city's population increases, our regional capacity to feed ourselves is decreasing. In addition to supporting regional agriculture, the City needs to devise consistent policies with clearly-drafted and easy-to-follow rules among its agencies regarding our most local agriculture – community gardens and urban farms – for which there is inconsistent public policy. Indeed, on the recent inauguration of Farm School NYC, the urban farm “college,” started by Just Food, it was reported by UrbanFarmeronline.com: “Urban farmers face unique challenges when it comes to dealing with land scarcity, an urban eco-system, and the political whims of city governments.”^v As the City has undertaken the strategic preservation of our watershed, so must it develop comprehensive strategies to preserve and strengthen our traditional foodshed and to facilitate urban farming, which, together, can help ensure New York City's good food security into the future.

PlaNYC 2030, focuses on the “physical city,” and leaves “crime, poverty, education, (and)...social services” to “other City efforts.” Crime, poverty, education, and social services, as well as public health, are respectively within the portfolios of particular City agencies. Food has no champion in the City. All cities, including New York City, must “keep food on the table” and consider all aspects of our food cycle, from production through disposal, when planning for a sustainable future.^{vi}

The Food Systems Network NYC urges the Office of Long Term Planning and Sustainability to recognize the place our food system must have in our vision of a sustainable city, by specifically, addressing hunger and nutrition, our regional farm and food economy, and the need for the City to engage actively in self-interested food policy at all levels of government.

ⁱⁱ 2009 Annual Hunger Survey. New York City Coalition Against Hunger.
<https://www.nyccah.org/2009annualhungersurvey>

ⁱⁱⁱ “High Jobless Rates among Blacks and Hispanics.” Patrick McGeehan. *New York Times*. Oct 28, 2010

^{iv} American Farmland Trust. www.farmland.org/newyork

^v “School to Train New York City Farmers.” Rebecca Mumaw. October 26, 2010. www.urbanfarmeronline.com

^{vi} “While planning for the future, keep food on the table.” Hilary Baum for the Office of the New York City Public Advocate. 2007

1. HUNGER AND NUTRITION

1.1 Ensure Access to Good Food within 1/4 Mile of Every NYC Resident

The City of New York should continue to support existing good food programs and create new programs that increase access to fresh healthy food, with the goal of creating sources within ¼ mile of every resident.

The connection between availability of fresh produce and positive public health outcomes is well documented.¹ If purchasing fresh vegetables and fruits is easy and convenient, people will be more likely to eat them. Wide disparities in access to fresh and healthy food exist between neighborhoods across the City of New York. The NYC Department of City Planning found that “consumption of fruits and vegetables is lowest in neighborhoods where obesity and diabetes levels are high” – Harlem, the Bronx, far eastern Queens and the Rockaways, central Brooklyn, and northern Staten Island.² These neighborhoods are among the most underserved in terms of grocery stores and access to fresh produce.

The City has already committed to improving the availability of vegetables and fruits in underserved areas through the support and expansion of good food programs like the Greenmarket and other farmers markets, Green Carts, Healthy Bodegas, and Health Bucks. The City should continue supporting these programs and explore other policy options to supplement and expand good food access programs, including supporting zoning changes, granting tax incentives, easing permit processes, and creating new policies that help make healthy food accessible to every New York City resident.

The City established the Food Retail Expansion to Support Health (FRESH) initiative in 2009 to respond to the growing health disparities, including higher rates of diet-related diseases in low and moderate income neighborhoods with little or no access to grocery stores and supermarkets that offer a full line of healthy food products, especially fruits and vegetables.³ FRESH provides zoning and financial incentives to encourage development of these stores in designated areas, but the program contains a minimum store size requirement that would make it difficult for some fresh food retailers, such as small, start-up entrepreneurs and coops, to take advantage of the program. The City can create similar incentives that make it easier for smaller food enterprises to locate in underserved communities and serve the specific needs of each community.

1.2 Extend Support for Alternative Fresh Food Markets in Low Income Areas

The City should explore new ways to promote community supported agriculture programs (CSAs), farmers markets, co-ops, farm stands, buying clubs, and other alternative markets in communities where over 50 percent of residents are at or below 185 percent of the poverty level.

In the past, the City has created policies that encourage large and small businesses to increase availability of produce and other fresh healthy food in areas of the City with the greatest need. The City should enhance existing programs and create new opportunities for people to purchase

fresh, healthy food from regional producers, whenever possible, through alternative distribution channels.

For example, the City should support the continued expansion of Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) usage at CSAs, farmers markets, and other alternative purchasing channels.⁴ As of Fall 2010, 40 of the City's 51 Greenmarkets accept EBT transactions and customer response has been significant. Food stamp usage doubled at Greenmarkets from \$100,772 in 2008 to \$226,469 in 2009⁵ and the market has shown strong growth potential. GrowNYC estimates that sales for this year will reach \$500,000, but this represents only a minute percentage of the \$3.2 billion in food stamp benefits that New York City residents are projected to receive in 2010.⁶ The City should also continue to support and expand the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DoHMH) Health Bucks program and use of the NYS Farmers Market Nutritional Program coupons.

Along with its Green Carts program, the City should consider ways to support additional alternative methods for getting good food into underserved neighborhoods, such as mobile market vans delivering food by the box and other mobile fresh food delivery systems, buying clubs, and CSAs, as well as encouraging direct sale partnerships between regional farmers and low-income residents.

1.3 Promote Good Food Education and Ensure New York City Residents' Food Security

Through public awareness campaigns and education, the City should encourage the consumption of healthy and nutritious food and increase participation in government-funded food programs.

More than half of New York City adults are overweight or obese and the rates among children are equally startling: one in five kindergarten and one in four Head Start children suffer from obesity.⁷ As the population of the City grows, ensuring the health of all residents must remain a foremost policy goal. The City has taken commendable steps to reduce the effects of unhealthy food, such as the DoHMH's recent ban on trans-fats and its requirement that chain restaurants post the calories of its menu items. The City should continue and expand its fight for good health through good food and health education and awareness building.

To counteract the pervasive marketing of fast and unhealthy food, the City should expand good food and nutrition educational campaigns in schools and in public spaces, including targeted ads in subways and public service announcements. The City should expand its partnerships with other food, farming, and community-based organizations to launch programs that enhance the New York City food system, as it has with the NYC School Gardens Initiative, the Farm to School and Garden to Café initiatives, the Food Bank's CookShop, and SchoolFood initiatives. Also, the City can help food insecure New York City residents make healthier food choices by expanding nutrition education and emergency food assistance programs⁸, such as SNAP and WIC, and funding public awareness campaigns about the use of EBT cards at Greenmarkets and other farmers markets, Green Carts, and CSAs.

The NYCCA estimates that there are about 700,000 City residents who are eligible for but who are not enrolled in food stamp and other food assistance programs. This gap deprives the City's

economy of about \$1 billion in potential food dollars spent locally.⁹ To ensure food access for all New York City residents, the City must continue to support outreach programs, such as the Human Resource Administration’s Food Stamp and Nutrition Outreach Program (FSNOP)¹⁰ to connect more eligible residents to benefits. The City should also create easy-to-read eligibility and application information guides for potentially eligible residents, similar to the NYCCA’s “Guide to Free Food and Assistance” brochure, (which explains eligibility and application information and gives information about emergency assistance food centers by neighborhood). The City should continue to provide local support in community centers through the Paperless Office System and by advertising the online application system on Access NYC.¹¹ And the City should find ways to simplify the application processes.

2. REGIONAL FARM AND FOOD ECONOMY

2.1 Support Local and Regional Food Production

The City should protect our regional foodshed and create economic growth by encouraging purchase of regionally-grown food and facilitating local, value-added food processing.

Food, like clean air and water, is a “strategic commodity,” necessary to the existence of the City and the health well-being of its residents. Increasing our local food supply brings numerous economic, health, environmental, food safety, and security benefits to the City and its residents.¹²

Agricultural and food production in New York State generates more than \$31 billion in revenue annually.¹³ An estimated 25 percent of the state’s land is used for agricultural production, but farmland is disappearing at an alarming rate and New York lags far behind its neighboring states in farmland protection, with currently less than two percent of farmland preserved against developmental pressures.¹⁴

While New York State is the second largest apple producing state in the United States, most of the apples consumed in New York City are grown outside of New York State and even in other countries. The City should work with the state and local jurisdictions to support the preservation of our foodshed and to encourage regional farmers to see the City as a viable and profitable marketplace for their products.

New York City neighborhoods have enjoyed an increase in urban agriculture in recent years by virtue of the good work of organizations that seek to increase and promote local food sources and help connect consumers to the producers of their food. East New York Farms!, Added Value Farms, and the Eagle Street Rooftop Farm, all located in Brooklyn, are examples of successful urban initiatives that engage the community and provide education about farming and food production. The City should support the development of similar innovative urban agriculture initiatives, food-producing community gardens and rooftop farms. Land is an essential to local food production; the City should facilitate local, urban food production by creating land use incentives and supporting mechanisms.

Regional and local food production and local food processing are means to foster local entrepreneurship, keep food dollars in our local economy, create good jobs and economic opportunity, and contribute to the availability of good food in our city.¹⁵

2.2 Improve Channels of Food Distribution

The City should ensure that there is sufficient infrastructure in place to support the flow of fresh produce into and within the City in order to provide residents with more local and regional food.

The Hunts Point Terminal Produce Market is New York City's premiere intermodal produce transfer and distribution facility, supporting over 60 percent of New York City's produce consumption and 40 percent of our region's produce consumption. However, the market is currently operating beyond its warehousing capacity in sub-optimal, obsolete facilities.¹⁶ The Produce Market is comprised of 46 wholesalers who serve the independent and ethnic food retailers that dominate much of the City's food marketplace. Modernization of the Produce Market is needed to retain more than 3,600 high-wage jobs, while ensuring that consumers have affordable access to fresh produce, to render operations more environmentally friendly, and to achieve higher standards of food quality and safety.

The City should also develop more wholesale farmers markets and other distribution points at key points throughout the five boroughs to accommodate additional local and regional food sources and to alleviate the environmental and health consequences of concentrating truck routes through one area of the City.¹⁷

To help ensure the continued existence and growth of the City's Greenmarket and other farmers market programs, the City must address obstacles that challenge farmers at markets. Poor infrastructure, including transportation barriers and lack of access to water, electricity, and storage and sanitary facilities, are disincentives to more regional farmers viewing City farmers markets as viable market alternatives. Investment in better market infrastructure, including creating indoor and covered markets, would help ensure residents better direct access to regional produce by providing farmers with a sense of permanent market presence.¹⁸

2.3 Evaluate Food Systems

The City should develop food assessment and mapping capabilities in support of comprehensive local and regional food system planning, including potential and actual food production capacity and food distribution.

New York State's capacity as a significant agricultural producer may be obvious, but little formal study exists regarding the actual and potential capacity of regional production. One such study is under way in an initiative announced in January 2010 by the Urban Design Center at Columbia University, which aims to conduct an in-depth examination of the regional foodshed and expand upon previous measurements of the production capacity of our region.¹⁹

The New York City Regional Foodshed Initiative will examine "localized land use, soil type, transportation infrastructure, and climatic conditions to assess production at several scales, as

well as actual New York City consumption data. Additionally, the initiative compares existing regional production and distribution with potential regional production and distribution to identify concrete possibilities for enhancing regional food capacity.”²⁰ The Foodshed Initiative will expand on the more local initiative of the Urban Design Center to measure the local food production capacity of the New York City metropolitan region.

Support of comprehensive, City-wide mapping and assessment initiatives would aid the identification of potential strengths that could enhance local and regional food systems and create greater potential to connect City eaters with regional producers. Tools such as these would also be used to link regional producers with processors that might use their products, creating a vital producer and processor business network.

2.4. Support the Development of a “Green,” Food-based Economic Sector

The City should promote the development of “green,” entrepreneurial and good job opportunities supporting our regional farm and food economy.

The Kitchen Incubator at La Marqueta in East Harlem anchored and operated by Hot Bread Kitchen, helps food entrepreneurs start and grow local businesses by providing facilities, training, and technical assistance for up to 40 food manufacturing startups.²¹ The City should replicate this type of incubator facility in other boroughs, ideally in proximity to farmers markets offering wholesale pricing. The City can also encourage small-scale local food processing by: giving incentives to those processors who source from local and regional producers, simplifying permit processes, and providing regulatory and licensing “roadmaps” to aid entrepreneurs interacting with City agencies.

The City should encourage enterprises and programs that enhance job skills in food-related fields, such as urban agriculture, aquaculture, hydroponics, and “green” roof design. For example, new models for training farmers in the City include Farm School NYC, recently launched by Just Food, and Kingsborough Community College’s expanded culinary arts program, which includes workforce development and the construction of an urban farm.

Our farmers are aging and, in many cases, there is not a new generation to assume family farm operation. GrowNYC’s New Farmer Development Project (NFDP) helps immigrants who already have agricultural experience to become regional farm operators through providing a variety of services including a ten week training course, land identification assistance, marketing support (Greenmarket, CSAs), one-on-one technical assistance, and a peer-monitored microcredit loan fund. This is another valuable example of job-creation tools that increase regional food production and preserve farmland.²²

Opportunities for job creation exist throughout the food system, from production and processing, through distribution, marketing, and, finally, to composting food waste. The City should create and promote large-scale municipal composting sites that provide good jobs as well as finished compost, an important resource for creating and restoring the soil in the City’s community gardens and urban farms.

3. FOOD POLICY ENGAGEMENT

3.1 Create a NYC Food Policy Council

The City should establish a Food Policy Council to help coordinate a comprehensive response to food-related issues and opportunities.

Food Policy Councils exist around the country, and, indeed, the world, to bring together stakeholders from diverse, food-related sectors to examine how the food system is operating and to develop recommendations for improvement.²³ The City should draw upon the experiences and accomplishments of existing models in other cities to inform the creation of a unique NYC Food Policy Council. Models include governmental councils, quasi-governmental councils, and advisory committees and our own New York State Council on Food Policy.²⁴

An ideal New York City Food Policy Council should bring together a broad group of governmental, non-governmental and public, private stakeholders to help identify the best ways to address interconnected issues around food and, thereby, improve the overall food system.²⁵ By seeking guidance from a variety of food system segments, including diverse community voices, the NYC Food Policy Council can draw on deep and broad expertise to assess and monitor the economic, health, and environmental impact of producing, distributing, and consuming food in our City. The Council could be empowered to accomplish multiple goals and tasks, including conducting analyses and assessments, engaging in public education, helping coordinate among stakeholders, including government agencies, acting as a food system ombudsman, and making recommendations that would help shape a comprehensive food system policy.

3.2 Encourage Government and Private Sector Purchase of Regionally Produced Food

The City should encourage public and large-scale private institutional food purchasers to source from local and regional food producers.

New York City serves approximately 217 million meals and snacks per year through its schools, hospitals, jails, and senior meals and other programs.²⁶ The City, by necessity, is a major purchaser of produce and food products and, so, can use its tremendous purchasing power to give meaningful market support to local and regional food producers. The City might also create incentives for other large-scale, non-governmental food purchasers (such as private hospitals, private universities, hotels, and others) to follow the City's lead by placing a priority on more sustainable, local and regional food purchasing.

Encouraging procurement from local and regional producers will directly impact the regional economy by providing producers with a stable, sustainable market for their products, thereby showcasing the unique diversity of our regional foodshed. Regional procurement also will lessen the environmental impact of food production and distribution by supporting farmers who produce food that can be delivered quickly, at the height of its freshness.²⁷

3.3 Engage All Levels of Government in Good Food Policy

The City should use its estimable resources to actively advocate for good food policy at every level of government and through every stage of the food cycle, from production, through distribution, consumption, and composting, to ensure that the food system benefits all New York City residents.

As the most populous city in the United States, with a population more than twice as great as the next largest city, New York City is uniquely situated to influence the national food discussion and to advocate for good food policy at all levels of government. Federal and state laws that regulate the production and distribution of food have a great impact on the environmental, health, and economic well-being of New York City, and so it is crucial to the future well-being of its residents that the City engage in bold, forward-thinking policy advocacy that will help ensure that both state and federal legislation and regulatory policies directly and positively affect the food eaten in our city.²⁸

Areas of federal food-related policy in which New York City has interest include the reauthorization and potential revisions of the Farm Bill, the Child Nutrition Reauthorization, and immigration reform, particularly as it affects hired farm labor and the creation of new farmers. Similarly, State policies, in which the City has interest, impact farmland preservation, economic development, and farm labor

New York City already has policy structures in place to advocate for its interests at the State and Federal levels, such as the Mayor's Office of Intergovernmental Affairs. The City should ensure that food issues are included in the policy agendas of these offices. Also, the Office of the Food Policy Coordinator, which is charged with engaging and coordinating among City agencies that run and support food-related programs, similarly can engage with other food policy advocates and with the NYC Food Policy Council, as proposed above, to drive the City's food-related initiatives. A coordinated and synergistic system of City actors engaged in the cause of good food can create a strategic agenda of policies and practices to improve the health and well-being of New York City residents, their communities, and our city, and, ultimately, the health of our region and our nation.

This document was prepared by Rachel Dobkin, Kristin Pederson, Viktoriya Syrov, Ed Yowell, and Carolyn Zezima on behalf of the Food Systems Network NYC.

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