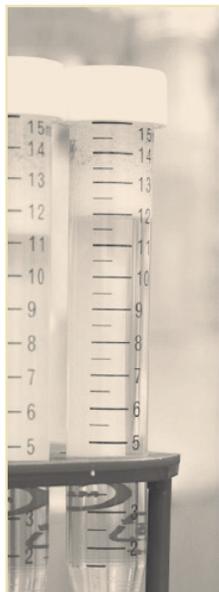


Food and the New York City Budget

A Review & Analysis of Municipal Budget Allocations in Fiscal Years 2019 & 2020

OCTOBER 2019



Executive Summary

How New York City government spends its tax dollars affects every aspect of the food New Yorkers produce, sell, buy, prepare, eat and dispose. Budget decisions shape who is hungry and who not, how many New Yorkers suffer from diet-related disease, how easy it is to find healthy affordable food in all the city's neighborhoods, and the extent to which labor laws protect low-wage food workers.

Yet the complex process of approving and spending the city's budget and allocating funding to various food-related programs and policies remains obscure for many New Yorkers, including even those who are committed to creating healthier and more equitable and sustainable food systems. In this report, the staff of the CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute seeks to illuminate this process. Our goal is to enable New Yorkers, including community residents, advocates, and policy makers to participate more fully in budget decisions. By describing how New York City government allocates its budget, makes capital investments, distributes grant funding, expands or eliminates established food programs, and considers the budget requests put forward by local communities, this report sets the stage for ensuring that New York City's food-related budget is spent widely and effectively.

More broadly, the report contributes to the creation of ongoing platforms where food-specific items in the city budget can be tracked, monitored, and summarized across multiple agencies and organizations throughout the budget planning cycle.

The creation of a dedicated platform for monitoring municipal food spending is a critical step towards encouraging the city to take a whole system approach to planning for New York City's complex food system. The development of this approach was one of the key recommendations of the recently released *Growing Food Equity in New York City* report by the New York City Council. A systems approach may help overcome one of the limitations of the first wave of food activism in New York City, which proposed many competing goals, did not set priorities, and allocated insufficient new resources to achieve key goals.

By critically analyzing how New York City spends money on food and ensuring stronger coordination of multiple programs and policies, city government and residents can better achieve their goals of creating a healthier, more equitable and sustainable food system. As we show in this report, a systematic scan of three key components¹ of the city budget for fiscal years 2019 (FY19) and 2020 (FY20):

- 1) the Adopted Expense, Contract, and Revenue Budgets;
- 2) Discretionary Funding; and
- 3) the listing of Community Board Budget Requests

¹ For the purposes of this report, the Capital Budget was not included in the food systems spending analysis.

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shows that a more holistic view of food systems and public spending in the city is achievable.

This report summarizes information on the budgeting process and current funding for some key food programs supported by the New York City government. While not all publicly available datasets enable detailed analyses of all categories of the food budget, they do offer a wealth of information that New Yorkers can use to learn more about the ways in which different food system goals are advanced or delayed as a result of the budget decisions every year.

The report seeks to answer these questions:

- 1. Who makes food decisions in the city budget? What are the roles of various city agencies and officials in the budget process?*
- 2. What is the breakdown of city spending on food in FY20? What domains of food policies and programs are the most and least funded? Which city agencies currently distribute the largest share of municipal food-system funding?*
- 3. How do food-system budget allocations and requests for FY20 compare to FY19? Has food-system related funding changed significantly or remained the same?*

Our main findings are:

- Several city bodies including the Mayor's Office, City Council, Borough Presidents, the Public Advocate, and the Comptroller play key roles in the city's budget process and in making decisions about how to spend city dollars on food. Thus, citizens and nongovernmental organizations have many opportunities to participate throughout the year in influencing budget decisions. They can testify at public hearings, make budget requests to community boards, and submit participatory budgeting projects in their council district.
- Our analysis of the City's adopted budget found that in FY20, the food system-related allocations total more than \$970 million. However, this represents only 1% of the overall city budget. Discretionary allocations to nonprofit organizations through the City Council Schedule C funds add about \$16 million for food system-related programs – from urban farming, to emergency food assistance, healthy food access, nutrition education, and food waste management, to mention a few.
- In the adopted FY20 City budget, the top 5 city agencies that currently distribute municipal food-system funding are the Department of Education (DOE), the Department for the Aging (DFTA), the Department of Social Services (DSS) /Human Resources Administration (HRA), the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), and the Department of Correction (DOC).
- Through its Office of Food & Nutrition Services, and its food procurement for about 940 thousand meals per day, DOE oversees about 60% (\$579M) of the all food-system related funds

in the FY20 city budget. Contracts for Congregate Meals and Kitchen Staff salaries at senior centers (est. \$88.1M²), Home Delivered Meals for seniors (\$41.9M), and City Meals on Wheels administration (\$2.6M) are key food-related programs in the city budget for DFTA. Other large programs are DSS's Food Stamps/SNAP operations (\$76.7M) and its Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) (\$20.9M³). The largest share of DOHMH's food related spending goes to its Food Safety programs (\$16.5M). Among the key food access and healthy nutrition is the Eat Well Play Hard in childcare settings (\$1.5M). Lastly, the Department of Correction's total budget allocation for food supply and nutritional services (\$24.5M) places it among the top 5 city agencies in food-system related expenses.

- Our analysis of discretionary funding provided by City Council to community organizations for FY20 for food system related programs and services shows that the largest share of this \$16 million in food systems spending is allocated to programs that support a variety of local, food and senior initiatives as well as Speaker's initiatives to address citywide needs.
- Overall, in FY20, more than 200 community board budget requests addressed food system matters, which represents about 6% of all community board budget requests included in the register for the current fiscal year. Of these, the largest share focused on health and nutrition, food security, and environmental sustainability with an emphasis on waste management and pest control. Local food economies and improving the conditions of food workers were the food policy areas least addressed in FY20's requests.
- Compared to FY19, total funding for food-system spending increased by \$41.4 million in the FY20 budget. Largest departmental increases in for FY20 year are +\$16.1M for DOE, of which +\$13M was for School Food Service, +\$10.4M for DFTA, of which \$10M are in baselined funding for congregate meals and kitchen staff, the +\$7.8M⁴ for Department of Parks & Recreation (DPR) for GreenThumb, and DSS/HRA's Food stamps budget allocation (+\$2.7M) and SNAP Bonus Award (+\$2.4M). The additional funding for DPR, reflects the data included in the modified FY20 budget, where it is explicitly allocated to GreenThumb for the maintenance of the city's 500+ community gardens. Actual spending throughout the rest of the fiscal year may differ based on changes in projected needs and other factors.

² This is an estimated amount based on the analysis of the DFTA Spending data for FY19, available through Checkbook NYC. Spending data for FY19 shows that there are about \$78,101,132 spent for congregate meals/lunches and social services for older adults. These funds are not directly identifiable in the publicly available datasets on the adopted budgets as they are included under an aggregate budget line. As spending for FY20 is still ongoing, to estimate the FY20 budget amount for this program, the additional \$10 million in baselined funding negotiated by the City Council for the program were added to the FY19 spending amount (see New York City Council, Schedule C, June 19, 2019).

³ This amount reflects adopted FY20 budget items with Budget Code Name "Emergency Food Assistance" and Unit of Appropriation name "Adult Services – OTPS." The actual amount toward the program might differ (e.g., see New York City Council Growing Food Equity in NYC Report, 2019).

⁴ This amount reflects the information provided in the most recent modified FY20 budget where a new "GreenThumb Proj" budget line, with budget codes 6893 and 2821, includes a projected spending for about \$7,789,014.00 for Maintenance & Operations (OTPS and PS).

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- Among the programs that saw the most dramatic decreases in budget allocations are the Department of Sanitation DSNY (-\$1.7M) for its composting and organics processing program and the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) (-\$1.5M) for the Head Start health and safety compliance (PS/staff expenses), which includes food safety for the spaces where food is handled on site. The decrease in DSNY funding is likely related to the \$5M savings in FY19 and the limited participation in the pilot organics collection program, whereas the decrease in ACS's Head Start funding can be attributed to the transfer of oversight of Head Start from ACS to DOE.
- Programs whose budgets have remained the same for FY20 include the food procurement allocation of the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) (\$13.2M), three of DOHMH/DPR Obesity Task Force Programs (I/C, Kids in Motion, Shape Up) (\$1M), the Department of Small Business Services (SBS) Food Business Pathways Program (\$130k), the DSS/HRA Mayor's Office of Food Policy (\$75k), and DPR's compost facility (\$19k).

As the New York City Council and the Mayor consider how to revitalize New York City's food policy for the next decade, making informed decisions on spending public money on food policies and programs will have a decisive impact on the city's success in achieving its goals. This report enables key constituencies to make more informed decisions.

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Note to Readers: This report is based on information available through October 25, 2019. Since the process for budget allocation and spending is dynamic and since this report relies on a variety of not always consistent public sources of evidence, we ask readers to send additions, corrections or suggestions to this report to UrbanFoodPolicy@sph.cuny.edu by December 1, 2019. In early 2020, we will release an update to this report including an analysis of the Mayor's Preliminary 2021 Fiscal Year Budget as well as additions or corrections to this report.



The CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute is an academic research and action center at the CUNY Graduate School of Public Health and Health Policy located in Harlem, NYC. The Institute provides evidence to inform municipal policies that promote equitable access to healthy, affordable food.