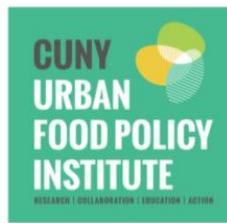


# Negotiating Conflict and Consensus Toward a Shared Food Future:

*Growing, Selling, Buying and Eating Food on the East End of Long Island*



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April 2021<sup>1</sup>

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## Executive Summary

The East End of Long Island is a place of remarkable contrasts. It is home to strikingly beautiful beaches, thriving and productive farms, and a bustling tourism industry. But the region's high-income levels mask economic inequalities, its mansions overshadow the lack of affordable housing, and rising seasonal tourism and local food production conceal high rates of unemployment and food insecurity, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In this report, we examine these contrasts through the lens of food to understand how they shape the lives of people who live, work within, or visit the East End. Our goal is to spark a community-wide conversation about how the East End currently grows, distributes, prepares, sells, and consumes food. We will use these conversations to identify strengths and weaknesses of the food system, and then work together to design solutions for relevant shortcomings or inefficiencies. Thus, this report is intended for all those who make decisions that affect the East End food system, with a particular focus on public policy makers, people who grow and sell food, and those seeking to promote social justice, sustainability and better health on the East End.

Throughout the report, we provide a portrait of the food system on the East End of Long Island, highlighting its accomplishments and deficiencies, as a whole and within its smaller components. This report further describes the current roles and obstacles of government, civil society, business, farmers, food workers, and residents in creating a healthier, more sustainable food system. It also sets the stage for a deeper discussion about how the East End food system connects more broadly with those in Suffolk County, New York City, and New York State. The desired outcome of this report is to contribute to the development of a comprehensive East End Food Plan that proposes shared goals leading to measurable improvements in diet, food security, sustainability, good food jobs, and a thriving East End economy. In this report, we highlight seven takeaways:

- 1. The East End is home to a diverse population, but high levels of inequality in food access, food insecurity, and diet-related diseases pose a threat to our future. These differences reflect disparities in income, wealth, access to affordable housing and other basic needs by class, race, and ethnicity.*
- 2. The East End has the potential to grow more food but achieving this potential will require resisting pressures for non-food related economic development.*
- 3. Tourism and second-home residents constitute an essential part of the East End community and influence all aspects of the food system. This promotes economic development and prosperity, but it also worsens economic inequality.*
- 4. Food plays a vital role in the economy and culture of the East End, but shared interest in food can serve both to bring people together and to divide them. Finding unifying values around the role of food in health, sustainability, equity, and economic development is a key to ensuring the future viability of the East End food system.*
- 5. The food workforce is essential to the East End economy, yet many of these workers earn relatively low wages and few benefits.*

6. *The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact across all sectors of the East End food system. In 2021, addressing the rise in food insecurity; high levels of unemployment in the food, hospitality and other sectors; and the continuing economic damage from the pandemic are urgent priorities.*
7. *Across the East End, multiple initiatives are being implemented to strengthen the food system. These efforts must be coordinated with organizations working together to make progress towards common goal.*

## **Questions to Guide Conversation**

Food systems are characterized by dynamic changes in response to social, economic, political, and environmental influences. Five years from now, the East End food system will inevitably look different from the one we see today. Whether those changes make East End residents healthier, better nourished, and more prosperous, and whether they make farming more sustainable, food workers better paid, and the local food economy more stable, depends on what we do tomorrow, next year and in the years to come. The surest way to ensure a more sustainable and equitable food future is to set goals, monitor progress and take action to ensure success in achieving our common aims. In order to create a shared agenda around competing priorities and viewpoints, it will be important to create opportunities for building common ground and open conversation. While summarizing the food system's existing data, we ask questions to deepen our understanding of how food production and distribution affect inequality throughout the East End. To make progress towards that end, we encourage an East End dialogue on these questions:

1. *How can we make significant progress in reducing overall rates of food insecurity on the East End and the wide gaps in rates between towns and populations?*
2. *How can the East End significantly increase the proportion of food consumed here that is grown here?*
3. *How can East End food businesses increase pay, security, benefits and working conditions of those employed in the food system here? How can town, county and state elected officials support such efforts?*
4. *How can the East End identify and reduce agricultural and other food practices that contribute most to carbon emissions, global warming, and pollution?*
5. *How can the East End effectively monitor, document, and ultimately reduce overall rates of diet-related diseases and shrink the gaps in rates by town, income, and race/ethnicity?*
6. *How can the East End create a fair and democratic process for food planning and monitoring that ensures a platform for the voices of all who live or work here to be heard?*
7. *How can those working to improve the East End food system best coordinate and work with advocates, public officials and food organizations working in Suffolk County, Long Island, New York City, and New York State?*

## Key Findings

**Key Finding 1. The East End is home to a diverse population, but high levels of inequality in food access, food insecurity, and diet-related diseases pose a threat to our future. These differences reflect disparities in income, wealth, access to affordable housing and other basic needs by class, race, and ethnicity.**

The popular stereotype of the East End of Long Island is a place of beautiful beaches, large mansions, and wealthy people living luxurious lives. But those who live on the East End know the reality is more complex. More than 11,000 of the area's 137,000 residents live below the poverty line.<sup>1</sup> Many more struggle to pay for housing, food, and health care, issues exacerbated even further by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Long Island Cares, an organization that operates one of two food banks on Long Island, supports 25 food pantries on the East End that together serve about 9,200 people annually.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the country, rates of food insecurity are much higher among people of color than white residents.<sup>3</sup> Of eight identified areas with the highest rates of preventable diabetes complications in Suffolk County, three are concentrated in the East End, including Riverhead, Greenport, and Cutchogue. Child obesity, a risk factor for diabetes and other chronic conditions, is also concentrated in pockets throughout Long Island. Like the Suffolk County rate, approximately 18% of the East End school district population is obese, with the highest rates concentrated in Shelter Island, Springs, Hampton Bays, and Riverhead.<sup>4</sup> Areas on the East End where 40% of students are overweight *or* obese include Greenport and Riverhead, which appear to be reflected by higher rates of poverty in those areas.<sup>4</sup>

One contributor to food insecurity is the high cost of housing on the East End, leaving households without sufficient income struggling to pay for housing and get the food they need. Almost 32% of Suffolk County rental households experience severe cost burdens, where housing expenses exceed 50% of income.<sup>5</sup> These rates are among the highest in New York State and the country. On the East End, the price of housing has increased over the last several years, as have the rents on the relatively few available rental units.<sup>5</sup>

Both unemployment and low wage jobs also contribute to food insecurity. In April 2019, the unemployment rate on Long Island was 3.1%. One year later, after the COVID-19 pandemic struck, unemployment soared to 16%.<sup>6</sup> Even before the pandemic, the tourist and second-home economy on the East End contributed to seasonal unemployment, making it more difficult for households to afford food year-round.

According to 2019 census estimates, 22,8647 East End residents are Latinx, 7,541 are Black or African American, 2,483 are Asian-American, and 1,656 report two or more races. In addition, 1,550 people live on the Shinnecock Nation's reservation. Altogether these groups represent more than one quarter of the East End population. Non-Latinx whites make up 74% of the local East End population, compared to the 55% of non-Latinx white residents which constitute New York State as a whole.<sup>7</sup>

Historic and structural racism continue to shape well-being on the East End, including through housing discrimination, school segregation, health, and socioeconomic disparities. Recent immigrants to the East End mostly from Latin America, constitute a vital part of the food, agricultural, and tourist workforce but often do not earn enough to feed themselves and their families. This spring, OLA of Eastern Long Island, a Latinx advocacy group, led a successful campaign to create a county supported food delivery services for food insecure families.<sup>8</sup> OLA, and organizations like them, work to reduce food insecurity, and are a vital food source to many families on the East End, even before COVID-19.

**Key Finding 2. The East End has the potential to grow more food but achieving this potential will require resisting pressures for non-food related economic development.**

In 2017, the market value of Suffolk County farm products was \$225 million.<sup>9</sup> Because 33,291 acres (about 85%) of Suffolk County's farmland is located on the East End, much of the county's economic vitality produced by farming, fishing, and food-related businesses is located there as well.<sup>10</sup> Suffolk County farms, 63% of which are in Riverhead and Southold, rank number four in New York State for the market value of total crops, nursery, greenhouse, floriculture, sod, and aquaculture. Suffolk County ranks within the top ten counties in the State for crops such as vegetables, melons, potatoes, sweet potatoes, fruits, tree nuts, berries, poultry, and eggs.<sup>9</sup>

The many bays, estuaries, and other waterways have the potential to contribute fish and shellfish to local and regional diets. However, real estate developers, and in some cases agricultural producers, can threaten seafood production by taking over waterfront property. Additionally, competition and tensions exist between those who fish for a living, those that fish recreationally, and those who use the waterfront for growing scallops and other aquaculture ventures.<sup>11</sup>

In order to maintain and increase the productivity of East End farms, farmland must be protected from non-farm developers. However, only 17,508 acres (52%) of the 33,291 acres of farmland on the East End is protected, leaving the remaining 15,782 acres vulnerable to private purchasing and development.<sup>10</sup> John Halsey, the President of the Peconic Land Trust, explains, farming is a "challenging way of life. Land values are very high, so holding on to land over generations is a challenge, and labor is a challenge. Competing with non-farmers who want land is a challenge. How do we ensure farmland is affordable to farmers, especially those who grow food? We've had to come up with some novel, outside-the-box tools to ensure that some of the land that's been protected by us, the towns, and Suffolk County over the last 40 years is actually available to be farmed."<sup>12</sup>

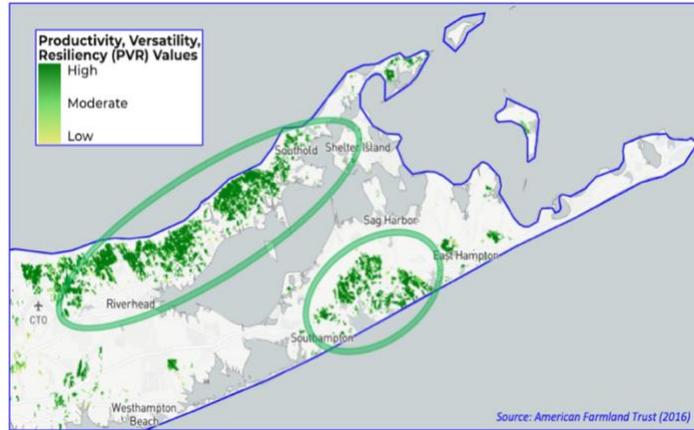


Figure 1. Map of PVR Values for Farmland on East End Towns as of 2016. PVR (productivity, versatility, and resiliency) values indicate the degree to which agricultural land is suitable for long-term intensive crop production.<sup>13</sup>

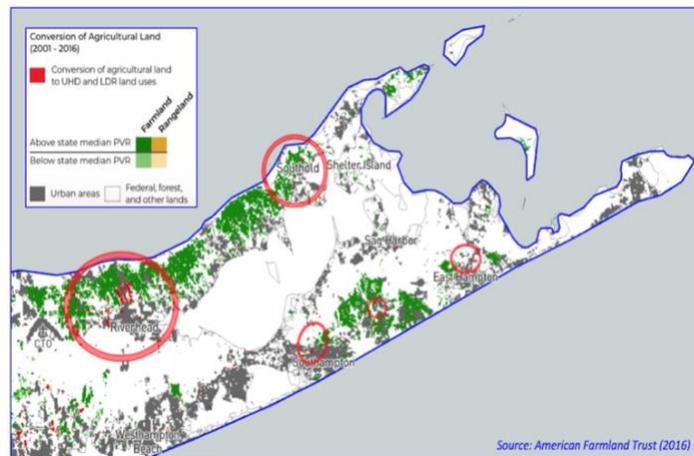


Figure 2. Map of Agricultural Land Converted to Urban and Highly Developed (UHD) and Low-density Residential (LDR) Land for East End Towns between 2001 and 2016.<sup>14</sup>

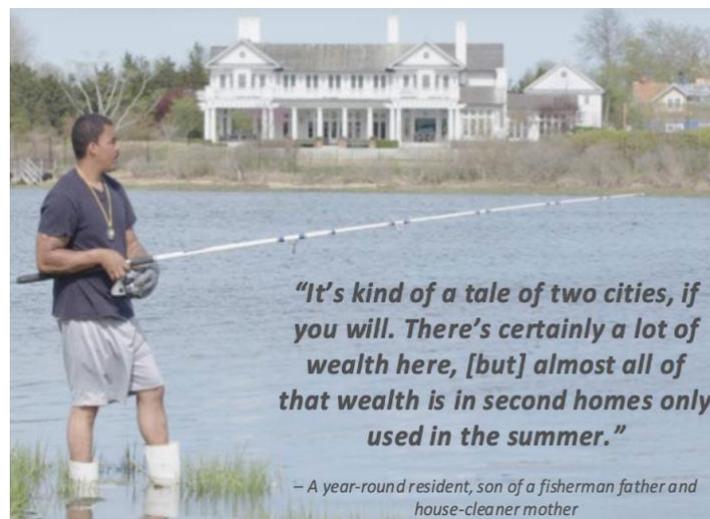
**Key Finding 3. Tourism and second-home residents constitute an essential part of the East End community and influence all aspects of the food system. The tourist economy promotes economic development and prosperity, but it also worsens economic inequality.**

With an annual average of approximately 6 million visitors, Long Island receives more than \$5.9 billion in tourist spending (2017) at local businesses, restaurants, hotels, and other attractions.<sup>14</sup> In 1990, for the first time in Long Island history, tourism was the leading industry in both revenue and employment. Ever since, and especially on the East End, tourism has continued to dominate the economy.<sup>15</sup>

With almost double the number of restaurants compared to supermarkets, farms, farm stands, and superstores combined, the East End food system shapes its profits around tourism.<sup>16</sup>

The desirability of East End property, its seasonal economy, and the high rate of second-home ownership drives the high cost of living on the East End where second homeowners make up the majority of the population. For example, the town of East Hampton has approximately 23,000 year-round residents and 50,000-70,000 second-home and rental properties for summer residents.<sup>17</sup>

Rising land prices jeopardize farmers. More traffic increases pollution and decreased mobility. A shift to growing grapes for wine, cannabis in the future, flowers and shrubs for upscale consumers brings economic growth and jobs but not more affordable healthy food for local or regional eaters. In these ways, the tourist economy supports a thriving food system while also posing threats to well-being and a sustainable economy.



*Figure 3. East End resident shares insight on the wealth divide in the area.<sup>18</sup>*

**Key Finding 4. Food plays a vital role in the economy and culture of the East End, but shared interest in food can serve both to bring people together and to divide them. Finding unifying values around the role of food in health, sustainability, equity, and economic development is a key to ensuring the future viability of the East End food system.**

For many tourists and second homeowners, the fresh fruits and vegetables, local wines and seafood from the East End are prime attractions. But too often, these products are not affordable for many year-round residents, especially those with lower incomes. Growing the economy to produce more of these products can widen gaps in access to healthy affordable food. It can make more lower income families dependent on the

cheaper highly processed products and less healthy products shipped in from elsewhere.

Agritourism experiences such as celebrity-chef and farm-to-table restaurants, pick-your-own produce, specialty food producers, winery and brewery tours and tastings, and fishing trips also attract visitors to the East End. The food economy contributes substantially to the economic strength of the region.<sup>10</sup> The East End is home to more than 200 restaurants, 172 food stores, and more than 33,000 acres of farmland.<sup>9,16</sup> Because this economy is seasonal, thousands of workers employed in the food sector are left without work or need to seek other employment for half of the year.

In the business world, planners often seek the land use that brings the highest revenues but on the East End this practice could end up spoiling the very sources that bring us wild nature, healthy food, and decent sustainable jobs. As Rob Carpenter of the Long Island Farm Bureau states: “In the best of times, [adapting the Farm Labor Fair Practices Act] would have been difficult to deal with...Farmers are price takers, rather than price setters for their product. It’s very difficult to pass on the increased costs. The buyers can buy from Canada or Mexico or wherever they can get the cheapest price for their product. (But) isn’t it important to have agriculture here on Long Island to feed the population? Keeping growers growing is almost a homeland security issue.”<sup>19</sup> If the East End is to produce and consume more of its own food, residents and policy makers need to assess the costs and benefits of competing uses for land and water on the East End – including nature conservation, aquaculture, food and other product farming, affordable housing or real-estate development.

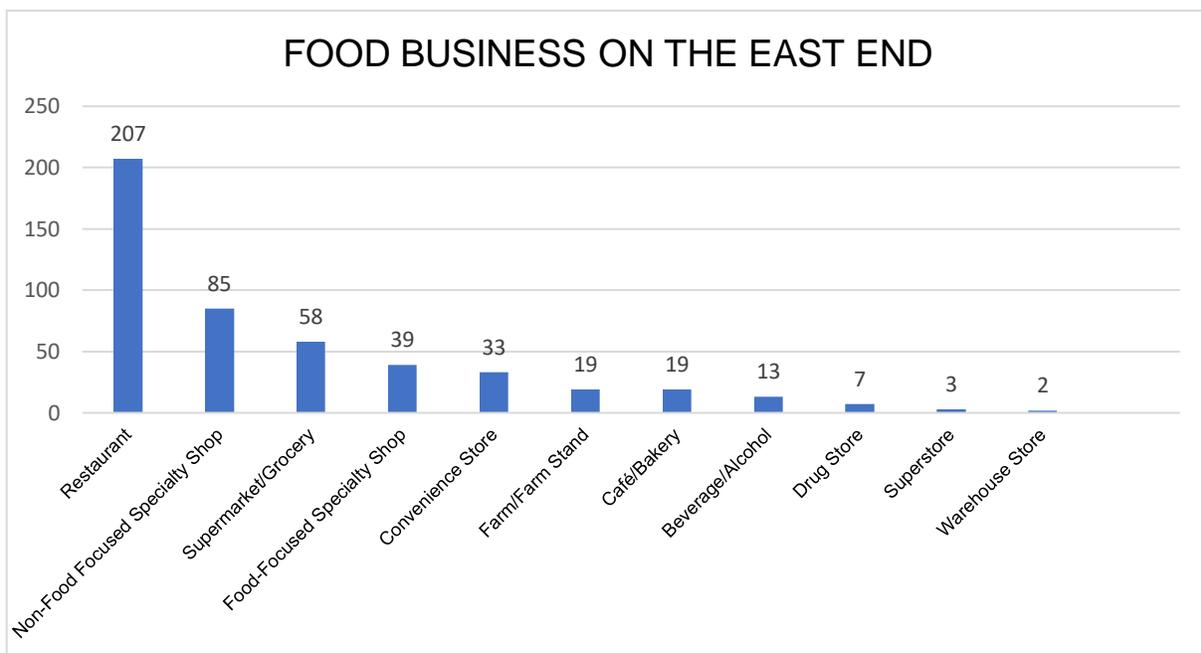


Figure 4. Food outlets on the East End (March 2020), including the towns of Southampton, Southold, Riverhead, Shelter Island, and East Hampton<sup>16</sup>

**Key Finding 5. The food workforce is essential to the East End economy, yet many of these workers earn relatively low wages and few benefits**

The food industry provides a significant portion of jobs across Long Island, and through 2026, food manufacturing and food services are expected to grow faster than other industries in the area.<sup>20</sup> In Figure 5, local services - largely made up of retail, food and other hospitality services - comprise nearly 17,000 jobs on the East End.<sup>21</sup> Food and beverage service transcends all of the four employment sectors, suggesting that this figure may be an underestimate of food-related jobs driving the East End economy.

The food sector and its workforce are key fixtures of the East End economy, but those who work in the East End food industry often earn among the lowest wages in the area. In 2018, the average annual wage for the Long Island Region was just over \$61,000 annually. Those who work in food and beverage services, however, earn approximately \$24,300.00 annually.<sup>20</sup> These low wages for the food workforce compound the challenges facing these workers and their families. The combination of scarce affordable housing, high costs for food and fuel, and low median incomes of many workers makes it difficult for many residents and families to thrive. According to Jay Schneiderman, Southampton Town Supervisor:

*"High housing costs have taken a toll on our sense of community by displacing the very people we need to keep the community running, like teachers, nurses and first responders." New affordable housing projects like Sandy Hollow and Speonk Commons, says Schneiderman, "bring a welcome opportunity for many people to be able to afford to live where they work on the East End."*<sup>22</sup>

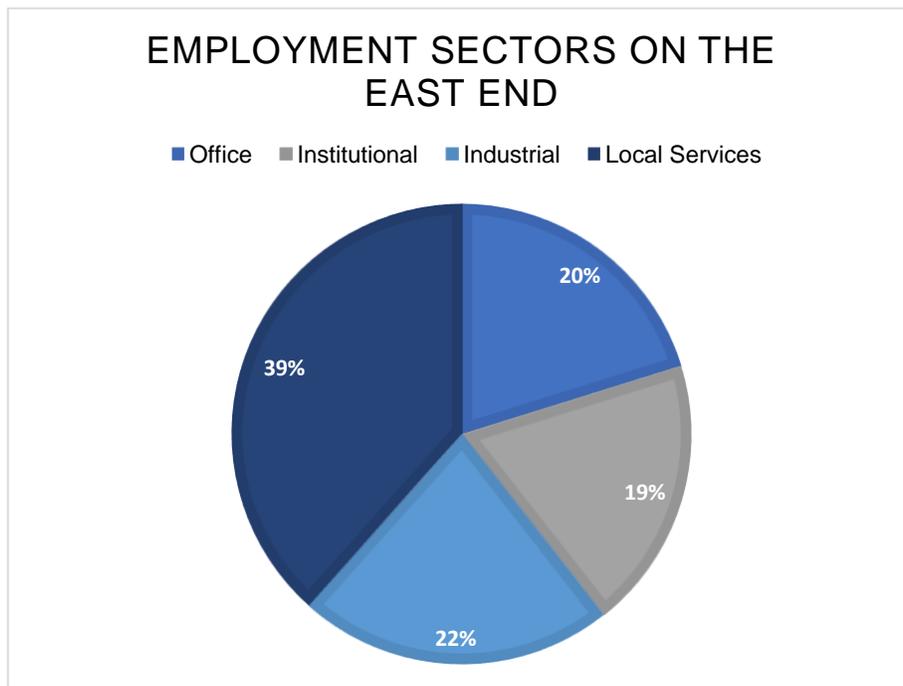


Figure 5. East End Employment by Sector<sup>21</sup>

**Key Finding 6. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact across all sectors of the East End food system. In 2021, addressing the rise in food insecurity; high levels of unemployment in the food, hospitality and other sectors; and the continuing economic damage from the pandemic are urgent priorities.**

Since the pandemic struck, the number of people experiencing food insecurity in Suffolk County increased by 76% from approximately 94,000 in 2018 to 164,000 in 2020, according to estimates from Feeding America.<sup>23</sup> To meet the growing need, some East End farms provided fresh produce for food pantries and started to offer online ordering, curbside pick-up, and making appointments for residents to visit community supported agriculture (CSA) farms. A partnership between Quail Hill Farm and one local food pantry, Bridgehampton Child Care and Recreation Center, provided fresh groceries to 700 families in one week, up from their usual 70 families per month.<sup>24</sup>

As more people chose to eat at home early in the pandemic, many dining establishments on the East End and elsewhere were devastated upon the shift to take-out. By April, hundreds of East End restaurant workers were furloughed.<sup>25</sup> The shut-down also triggered a ripple effect for some East End farms that depend on sales to NYC restaurants. One duck farmer explained “Normally I employ about 84 people. I laid off 70 people in the beginning of April. I’ve brought back about 50 to 55 at this point [by August 2020].…”<sup>26</sup> In March, the East End, and New York State as a whole experienced a record-breaking surge in unemployment applications.<sup>27</sup> Between February and April, Long Island businesses shed jobs faster than anywhere in the United States. The losses were most heavily concentrated among low-paying jobs in hospitality and precarious positions that pay less than \$35k annually -- jobs which are concentrated among workers without post-secondary education, exacerbating existing inequities among low-income communities and communities of color.<sup>28</sup>

For the East End to recover from the food, health and economic impact of COVID-19 will require strong leadership from elected officials and a determination to build back a better East End food system rather than simply restore our ailing food system to its status before COVID-19.

**Key Finding 7. Across the East End, multiple initiatives are being implemented to strengthen the food system. These efforts must be coordinated with organizations working together to leverage individual strengths and make progress towards common goals.**

Multiple initiatives involving thousands of people are working to improve the East End food environment. The following are a few examples of initiatives illustrating the breadth and interconnected nature of the work being done on the East End, including land conservation, sustainable land use, food security and health equity initiatives. Additional initiatives focused on Long Island, Suffolk County, and the East End have been compiled in Figure 9.

- The Peconic Land Trust and Nature Conservancy are protecting undeveloped agricultural land on the East End.<sup>29</sup>
- East End Food Institute's mission is to support, promote, and advocate for local food and local producers to create a more sustainable and equitable local food system.<sup>30</sup>
- OLA (Organización Latino-Americana) promotes social, economic, cultural, and educational development as well as food security within Long Island's East End Latinx communities.<sup>31</sup>
- Slow Food East End seeks to promote local good, clean, and fair food production to create sustainable positive change to the East End food system.<sup>32</sup>
- Quail Hill farm is a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm located on preserved land donated to the Peconic Land Trust. Quail Hill farm supports sustainable farm practices and food security initiatives including a farm to food pantry initiative launched in June 2020, and more.<sup>33</sup>
- All for The East End (AFTEE) is a non-profit organization working to support the work of organizations across the East End through funding.<sup>34</sup>
- Numerous community food pantries and programs in the North and South Fork support ongoing food assistance and respond to emergency food needs across the East End.<sup>35</sup>
- The Eastern Long Island branch of the NAACP, Erase Racism, and other groups combat systemic racism on the East End as it affects jobs, education, health care, the criminal justice system and voting rights. A 2019 prize-winning report by *Newsday* found that Long Island suburbs had among the nation's most segregated housing, showing the need for concerted action to reduce this moral stain.<sup>36</sup>



*Figure 6. OLA sponsors a forum on new 2019 law to allow immigrants to obtain drivers licenses, a change that allows immigrant farm and food workers to drive more safely to work<sup>37</sup>*

These organizations and others like them bring a wealth of resources, talent, and commitment to the quest for healthier, more sustainable, and more equitable food

environments for the East End. They constitute the critical ingredients for improving the local food system.

Each of these organizations also face significant challenges. Only modest efforts have been made to coordinate and find synergies across these many initiatives. In some critical areas, key constituencies have opposing goals, an occurrence not unique to the East End. For example, ongoing lobbying for better pay and benefits for workers in the farming and food industry has contributed to significant increases in the costs of running a farm or food business on the East End. While all workers deserve fair pay, this also drives up the cost of local food. Farm and environmental groups with competing interests have argued for years over the benefit of using pesticides and fertilizers to grow food versus the negative environmental impact of these products on the soil, water, and health of the people who live on the East End.

## A Food Vision for the East End

*Five years from now the East End will have healthier people and communities, more food grown and consumed locally, more food security fewer diet-related diseases, more food workers with decent pay, working conditions and benefits, less carbon emissions and pollution, more robust democracy, including food democracy, a stronger more prosperous food economy, and more equitable access to food, housing, health care and employment*

Some organizations and institutions working toward this vision are listed below. Should your organization be on this list? Are your activities contributing to an improved food environment on the East End? If they are, we invite you to help us explore and expand our search for the region’s assets and to help us identify and solve its problems. While those living on the East End do not have the power to influence all the factors that shape the local food system by themselves, no one has a bigger stake in achieving satisfactory outcomes than those who live and/or work here. Beginning this process now will increase the likelihood that in five years, the East End’s food system and its residents and workers will benefit from healthier, sustainable, and more equitable, thriving communities.

Food Security, Health, Research, and Education	Farm, Land, Water and Environmental Protection	Councils, Foundations, Institutions, and Departments
Community Action Southold Town (CAST) Cornell Cooperative Extension East End Food Institute East Hampton Meals on Wheels ERASE Racism Heart of the Hamptons Hallockville Museum Farm Island Harvest Food Bank JBJ Soul Kitchen Local North and South Fork Food Pantries Long Island Cares Long Island Health Collaborative Maureen’s Haven OLA (Organización Latino-Americana) of Eastern Long Island Peconic Bay Medical Center Rural and Migrant Farm Ministry Share the Harvest Farm Shinnecock Nation Senior Nutrition Slow Food East End Stony Brook Medicine Nutrition Dept. Sylvester Manor Educational Farm The Food Lab at Stony Brook Southampton	Concerned Citizens of Montauk Cornell Cooperative Extension Friends of the Long Pond Greenbelt Group for the East End Long Island Clean Water Partnership Long Island Farm Bureau Long Island Pine Barrens Society Peconic Bay keeper Peconic Estuary Partnership Peconic Green Growth Peconic Land Trust Perfect Earth Project Riverhead Neighborhood Preservation Coalition South Shore Estuary Preserve Save the Sound Stony Brook University The Long Island Native Plant Initiative The Nature Conservancy	All For the East End (AFTEE) Hamptons United Long Island Community Foundation Long Island Food Council North Fork Environmental Council Peconic Community Council Suffolk County Department of Economic Development and Planning Suffolk County Food Policy Council Suffolk County Health Department and Office of Minority Health Suffolk County Soil and Water Conservation District

*Figure 7. A snapshot of Some East End organizations and institutions working toward food security, local food sourcing, conservation and land use efforts, and/or health equity.*

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