

# TOWARDS A NYC COVID-19 FOOD RESPONSE IN 2021



The NY Food 20/20 Project, a collaboration of food policy researchers in New York City, provides evidence to help New York City and State public officials, legislators, health and nutrition professionals, activists, community-based organizations (CBOs), food businesses, and residents repair the damage to the city's food system that the COVID-19 pandemic caused and address pre-existing, underlying food problems. Below, we offer goals and strategies for policy action in 2021,

identified through analyses and in consultation with diverse constituencies. Our recommendations suggest specific actions that will have the greatest potential for impact in the coming year.

First, we identify six overarching goals, each accompanied by two priority action strategies. Then, we suggest examples of how policy makers could implement the suggested strategies.



# PROPOSED FOOD POLICY GOALS FOR 2021



Ensure that food is available through existing and emergency channels to all who need it.



Increase the healthfulness of food available through the emergency feeding and institutional meal systems.



Promote recovery, growth, and resiliency to build a more robust, sustainable infrastructure for New York City's food distribution, retail, and service economies.



Ensure food workers, including city-contracted food workers, receive adequate pay and benefits.



Create a coordinated, integrated, community-engaged structure to oversee food policy in New York City.



Invest in strategies that increase public power, control, and ownership of New York City's food system.

# Proposed Goals, Strategies and Examples for Food Policy Action in New York to Respond to the Pandemic in 2021

GOALS	PRIORITY ACTIONS	EXAMPLES
<b>Ensure that food is available through existing and emergency channels to all who need it.</b>	<b>1</b> Simplify enrollment processes and expand outreach to maximize participation in public food programs, including Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), among all eligible New Yorkers.	Assign the Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity with the task of coordinating deputy mayors and city agencies to accelerate the integration of program applications online, with particular attention paid to smartphone access.  The City should develop a central, privacy-protected electronic documents depository, so NYC residents in need of food resources can submit each required document once; the City can then use those documents to fulfill the requirements of applications for multiple programs as needed.
	<b>2</b> Continue to provide meals for vulnerable populations. Identify and fund opportunities that improve food distribution, nutrition quality, and participation to ensure home-delivered meals reach New Yorkers in need and healthy, culturally appropriate school meals are easily accessible for all school children.	Evaluate which factors of the GetFoodNYC program are associated with successful outreach, implementation, and client satisfaction. Evaluation could help the city to replicate strategies of the most successful vendors, for example, in providing culturally appropriate meals.  Extend the hours that families can pick up school meals from Meal Hub sites. Currently, most sites are open between 9:00 am and 12:00 pm, the same hours that many families are focused on learning. Introduce a new variety of menu items, including hot items, to ensure all students, especially those with health or religious dietary restrictions, participate in the meals program.
	<b>3</b> Adhere to the highest quality standards to ensure the healthfulness, cultural appropriateness, and safety of food served in institutional settings and the emergency food system.	Ensure the City Food Standards, scheduled for update this summer, are consistent with or exceed the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans and are implemented in a timely fashion. Ensuring high nutritional standards can improve health, encourage program participation, and help NYC residents reduce or manage diet-related chronic diseases.
<b>4</b> Provide additional funding to food banks and food pantries to secure more healthful options that meet the nutritional needs of vulnerable NYC residents during and after COVID-19.		Allocate additional funds to increase fresh and frozen produce purchases, support staff, and expand hours of operation.
<b>Promote recovery, growth, and resiliency to build a more sustainable infrastructure for New York City's food distribution, retail, and service economies.</b>	<b>5</b> Provide financial support, clear guidance, and technical assistance to food retail vendors and food service establishments. These actions will support ongoing business operations while fully protecting workers and customers.	Develop clear guidelines with specifications for different types of food service vendors for safe food retail operations. These guidelines should enable retailers to anticipate changes in required protocols based on specific health parameters, such as changes in transmission rates and variations in other safety protocols.  Fund technical assistance and audits of food retailers, including restaurants and City vendors, participating in GetFoodNYC and other similar programs.
	<b>6</b> Develop additional subsidies, tax breaks, and rent guidelines that ensure economic viability of small independent food businesses. These supports must enable food distribution, retail, and service establishments to make healthy, affordable food more available in under-resourced communities.	Make financial assistance for independent, Black, and People of Color-owned food retailers in under-resourced communities a priority. Financial assistance can help promote economic resiliency and expand food access pathways for individuals in these communities.  Offer technical support, including supply chain and operations assistance, for small farmers selling directly to food retailers and consumers to promote access to fresh, affordable produce and to bolster regional agriculture.  Advocate for more food retail stores, including independent grocers, to accept SNAP orders online. Support to increase online SNAP could help ensure food retail establishments resume business and enable vulnerable populations to safely access food.
	<b>7</b> Strengthen enforcement of city and state minimum wage laws for all food workers.	Eliminate loopholes from minimum wage laws that prevent many food workers, such as tipped workers, from receiving a living wage. Increase wages for city-contracted food workers such as senior center cooks and Department for the Aging deliverers.
<b>8</b> Expand and strengthen enforcement of the benefits that food workers are eligible for such as paid sick leave.		Provide sufficient unemployment benefits to food and hospitality workers, including tipped and gig workers, to ensure that households can meet their living costs and remain healthy.
<b>Create a coordinated, integrated, community-engaged structure to oversee food policy in New York City.</b>	<b>9</b> Expand the budget and staff for the Mayor's Office of Food Policy to formalize the ties created across agencies during the COVID-19 crisis. The Mayor's Office of Food Policy should be responsible for coordinating the city's response to food dimensions of the pandemic with the development and implementation of New York City's 10-year food plan.	Develop mechanisms to ensure ongoing community participation in creating and monitoring the response. The process should aim to achieve measurable reductions in the racial, ethnic, and gender injustices in the city's food system and should spell out municipal food policy options to respond to the changing dynamics of the pandemic.  Identify specific, measurable reductions in the racial, ethnic, and gender injustices in the city's food system, as well as methods to regularly monitor progress.
	<b>10</b> Create and maintain publicly accessible databases that provide information on available food resources that residents, researchers, CBOs, and public officials can use to ensure equitable access to food resources across all New York City communities. An additional portal should be created to target non-English speakers and immigrants with a particular emphasis on which benefits are and are not covered by the new federal public charge rules.	Maintain a digital listing of food pantries, soup kitchens, farmers' markets, supermarkets, meals for seniors, SNAP enrollment centers, etc. at the neighborhood level to improve communication and awareness of these resources for individuals, CBOs, and elected officials.  Explore whether a relationship with the NYC Department of Information, Technology and Telecommunications (DOITT) could support the creation of a food policy dashboard that communities and public officials can use to monitor implementation of food policies, highlight community assets, and pinpoint areas where further resources are needed.
	<b>11</b> Develop and enact policies that increase ownership of food businesses by workers, non-profit CBOs, local government, and minority and women entrepreneurs. Ensure that existing procurement, tax, zoning, rent, and other policies support small and medium-sized, locally-owned food businesses, and do not privilege national or global chain food businesses.	Convene minority and women stakeholders to identify and design new programs that meet the unique needs of food businesses and nonprofits in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.  Fund and provide training and technical assistance to CBOs or residents that want to develop a worker owned cooperative food business. arrangements with each other and to support worker-owner cooperative efforts.
<b>Invest in strategies that increase public power, control, and ownership of New York City's food system.</b>	<b>12</b> Expand opportunities for locally-controlled food production to support urban and regional farms, especially those led or owned by people of color and women.	Increase the percentage of city food contracts granted to Minority and Women-owned Business Enterprises (MWBE) food businesses, in particular farms, restaurants, food trucks, catering companies, and restaurants. Provide technical assistance to CBOs and food businesses that want to become a certified MWBE vendor.
		Fund a Community Food Hub Incubator, as outlined in the Growing Food Equity in NYC report, to coordinate interested communities to develop more local food businesses and farm-to-city food projects.