



# NY FOOD 2025

GOAL 6

*Improve Coordination and Monitoring  
of Food Policy in New York City  
to Improve Health and Equity*



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## NEW YORK FOOD 2025 GOAL 6

# Improve Coordination and Monitoring of Food Policy in New York City to Improve Health and Equity

[New York Food 2025](#) is a collaborative effort by the Hunter College NYC Food Policy Center, The Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy, and The CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute to examine the effects of the pandemic on New York City's food policies and programs and propose specific policy measures the NYC Mayor and City Council can consider and implement to build a stronger, healthier, more just, and sustainable food system in New York City. This policy brief is one part of a 7-part series of policy briefs and recommendations and builds on our group's earlier report, [New York Food 20/20: Vision, Research, and Recommendations During COVID-19 and Beyond](#), on the impact of the pandemic on New York City's food system and food workforce.

## Background

Before facing the acute public health challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, New York City (NYC) residents faced – and continue to face – an epidemic of diet-related chronic diseases, such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, obesity, and certain cancers. An estimated 987,000<sup>1</sup> NYC residents have type 2 diabetes and more than half<sup>2</sup> of adult New Yorkers have overweight or obesity. Almost half of elementary school children in NYC do not have a healthy weight- 20% of kindergarten students and 25% of Head Start students have obesity,<sup>3</sup> putting them at increased risk of metabolic syndrome, type 2 diabetes, and cardiovascular disease.<sup>4</sup>

NYC residents who are food insecure face an elevated risk of developing diet-related diseases. A USDA study found that among working

age adults, lower food security is associated with higher probability of hypertension, coronary heart disease, hepatitis, stroke, cancer, asthma, diabetes, arthritis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and kidney disease.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Black and Latinx NYC residents disproportionately experience food insecurity<sup>6</sup> and diet-related chronic diseases as a result of longstanding structural racism.<sup>7</sup> Addressing food insecurity creates the opportunity to improve all diet-related health outcomes and advance efforts to achieve health equity.

Many studies have identified the root causes of these health disparities and high rates of diet-related noncommunicable diseases, which include: poverty, interpersonal discrimination, and structural oppression based on race, ethnicity, gender, citizenship status, and class.<sup>8</sup>

Policies and programs related to food policy in NYC span many different city, state, and federal agencies which makes coordination difficult at the agency level. Bureaucratic barriers to accessing services at the individual level can diminish program efficacy. Within the City alone, the NYC Department of Social Services, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, the Department of Education, the Department for the Aging, Department of Homeless Services, and the Department of Youth and Community Development are just a few of the NYC agencies that play a key role in food policies and programs. In order to address the complex social determinants of health that shape the health outcomes of all NYC residents, the City's food policies need better coordination across public agencies. While the pandemic has forced many NYC residents to rely more heavily – and some for the first time – on the emergency food system, the longstanding epidemic of diet-related chronic disease demonstrates the need to address the root causes of these diet-related diseases through both upstream and downstream interventions and enhanced agency coordination.

# GOAL

In the next four years, the Mayor and City Council should take measures to create integrated structures, processes, and systems to coordinate and monitor food policy in New York City to ensure substantial improvements to health and equity.

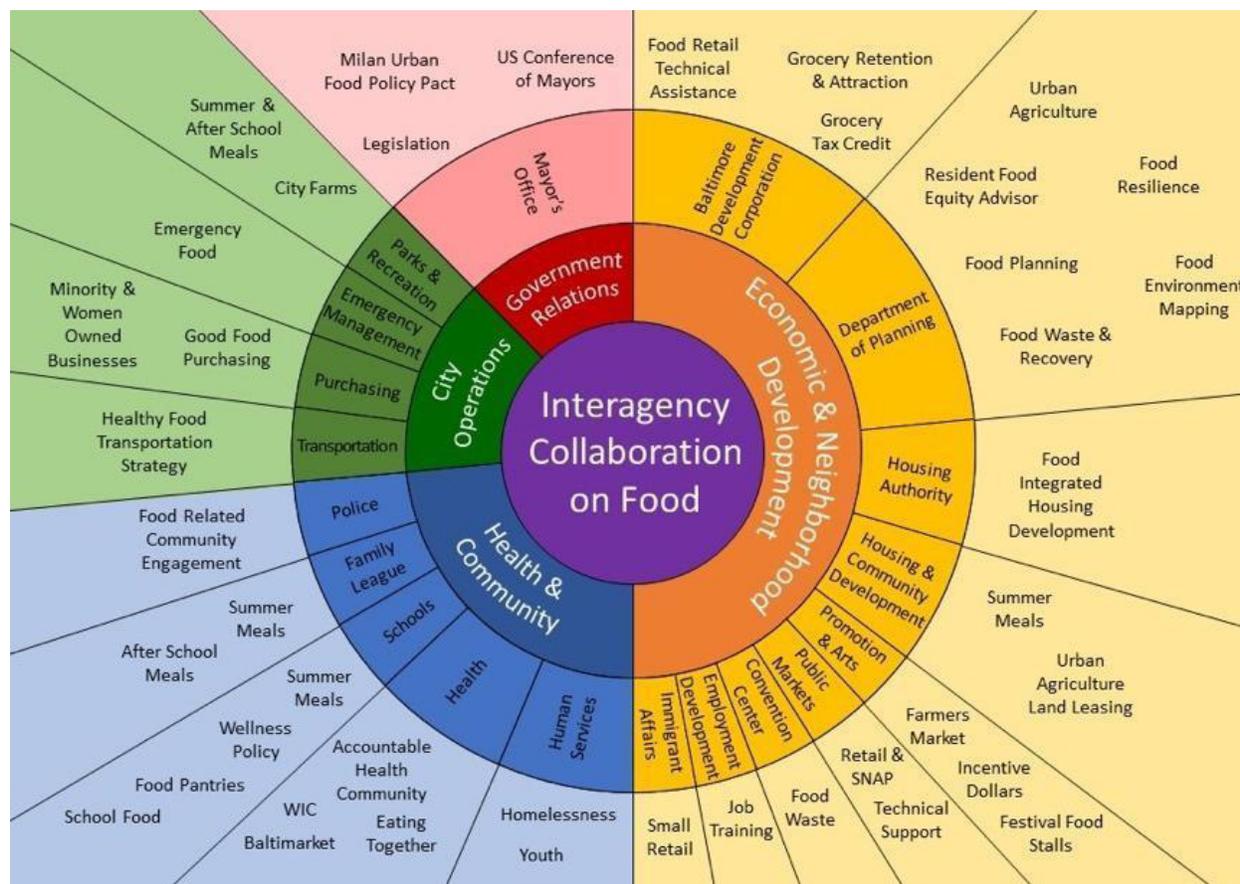
## Existing Programs and Policies

In an effort to better coordinate the City’s food-related health policies and programs, Mayor Bloomberg established the City’s first Food Policy Coordinator within the Office of the Mayor in 2008 via [Executive Order No. 122](#). In 2014, Mayor De Blasio renamed the position as the Food Policy Director,<sup>9</sup> located within the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services. In February 2020, the City Council passed [Local Law No. 41](#) that amends the NYC charter to require that the mayor

establish an office of food policy. By codifying the Mayor’s Office of Food Policy (MOFP) in the City’s charter, the MOFP is protected from being eliminated at the whim of a subsequent executive order.

The MOFP’s goals are to “increase food security, promote access to and awareness of healthy food, and support economic opportunity and environmental sustainability in the food system.”<sup>10</sup> Its duties include publishing an annual City Food Metrics Report,

Figure 1. Baltimore Food Policy Initiative



managing an interagency food task force, and coordinating emergency food capacity.<sup>11</sup> In the annual City Food Metrics Report, the ten NYC agencies that routinely purchase and serve institutional meals publish the number of meals and snacks they serve and document their compliance with certain NYC food standards, thus allowing stakeholders to monitor annual trends.<sup>12</sup>

While the MOFP has worked diligently to achieve its stated goals, the MOFP has been inadequately funded to fulfill its mission and expand its work across agencies.<sup>13</sup> For example, the annual food metrics report provides useful data to monitor and evaluate certain NYC food initiatives; however, as discussed above, there are complex social determinants of health inextricably linked with the City's food policies, but many of those determinants are not currently addressed in the annual report.<sup>14</sup>

New York City is not unique in the way its food policies span multiple agencies, nor in the need to improve interagency coordination.<sup>15</sup> Many cities – including New York City – are moving towards more interagency collaboration by drafting comprehensive plans for short- and long-term policy goals that recognize the need to involve diverse city, county, and state agencies.<sup>16</sup> NYC released Food Forward NYC: A 10-Year Policy Plan in February 2021, which draws from prior city food plans and sets goals regarding, among other things, strengthening cross-sector coordination around the development and implementation of food policy.<sup>17</sup>

## Policy Recommendations

In order to create integrated structures, processes, and systems to coordinate and monitor food policy in NYC to ensure substantial improvements to health and equity, the following policy recommendations should be considered by the City Council and Mayor Eric Adams.



**By the end of 2022, the Mayor and City Council should:**

**Improve coordination among agencies to avoid duplication of efforts.** The cost and administrative burden of duplicative efforts within our current food programs for both agencies and individuals is too high. At the individual level, some digital tools have been created, such as [ACCESS NYC](#) and [ACCESS HRA](#), to help streamline the delivery of food benefits to residents. While these have helped NYC residents find and apply for some benefits across agencies, the process is still burdensome, duplicative, and confusing for residents. According to a 2020 audit conducted by the NYC Human Resources Administration, approximately half of applications submitted for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and for Cash Assistance were rejected and the largest single cause for those rejections related to incomplete documentation.<sup>18</sup>

- The City should expand the budget and staff for the MOFP to formalize the ties created across agencies during the COVID-19 crisis.
- The City should allocate funds to the MOFP to retain outside consultants to audit current programs to provide guidance on needed cross-agency monitoring efforts going forward.
- The MOFP should be involved in City efforts to integrate and consolidate the social services application process via Mayor Adam's proposed MyCity portal, which should be done in collaboration with non-profit organizations whose mission is to increase outreach and facilitate enrollment in such programs.



**Between 2022 and 2025, the Mayor and the City Council should also:**

**Collect feedback from NYC residents to understand the needs of diverse communities.**

Through qualitative interviews conducted by the Hunter College NYC Food Policy Center in the summer of 2020, community members most in need expressed frustration, confusion, and vulnerability around finding food resources for themselves and their families.<sup>19</sup> Research by the Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy confirmed these sentiments. In interviews with parents of NYC school children, many parents were grateful for meals being provided by schools, but many also experienced barriers in accessing meals, such as lack of communication and inconvenient times and locations.<sup>20</sup> These parents also expressed appreciation for P-EBT cards, but due to sparse communication in the roll-out they reported difficulties in accessing the benefits and were confused about the amounts they were eligible to receive. Many community-based organizations mobilized to help people struggling to overcome these barriers and access benefits. For example, a local community-based organization, Community Food Advocates, developed [guides and presentations](#) to help people receive P-EBT cards. The MOFP should work with social service agencies and community based organizations to collect feedback on an on-going basis from residents regarding how food policies can better meet their needs. The MOFP should also work with other agencies to make their information and procedures more user-friendly.

- The MOFP should have a dedicated staff position that works with social service agencies and community-based organizations to collect feedback on an on-going basis from residents regarding how food policies can better meet their needs.

**Communicate to NYC residents about available food resources on a real-time basis.** As a model to build upon, the City can confer with the Hunter College NYC Food Policy Center about the [NYC Neighborhood Food Resource Guide](#) it created in partnership with local organizations and 100+ volunteers.

- The City should create and maintain publicly accessible databases that provide up-to-date information on available food resources that residents, researchers, community-based organizations, 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 federal rules.

**Monitor effectiveness and impacts of policies to ensure equitable outcomes across all communities.** To ensure equitable outcomes, the City will need to not only monitor the effectiveness of food specific initiatives, like the specific metrics outlined in the MOFP's annual food metrics report, but should also monitor and evaluate other broader urban policies that impact known social determinants of health, such as land use, transportation, labor, and housing.<sup>21</sup>

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