

NEW YORK NY, USA

BIG PLANS FOR A BIG CITY

This food policy snapshot is based on interviews with Kate MacKenzie, Director of the Mayor's Office of Food Policy, Karen Washington, Farmer, Co-Founder of Black Urban Growers, and Board Member of the Black Farmer Fund, and Nicholas Freudenberg, co-founder of the City University of New York (CUNY) Urban Food Policy Institute, Professor of Public Health, and Faculty Director of Healthy CUNY. Written by Georgia Tamez, Jean Luis Sano-Santana, and Taylor Foody - LBJ School of Public Affairs, University of Texas at Austin.

GLASGOW FOOD AND CLIMATE DECLARATION

New York City began to integrate food into its urban planning in the early 2000s. An early focus on reducing diet-related diseases has widened to address food security, regional agriculture, food distribution, and food waste. The City is committed to creating a more equitable, sustainable, and healthy food system through a number of progressive food policy initiatives like its ten-year food plan Food Forward and plant-based programs in public schools and hospitals. Despite its numerous successes, the City faces structural obstacles in achieving its sustainability goals: its vulnerability to climate change and powerful stakeholders might hamper the City's success. Yet New York City continues to make progress in procuring healthy foods through the Good Food Purchasing Plan, reducing food-related greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, adapting city infrastructure to withstand the effects of climate change, and empowering residents to participate in the transformation of the food system.

“Under the leadership of Mayor Adams, New York City is advancing policies to create a more equitable, sustainable, and healthy food system. It is an exciting time to be a New Yorker working in this space!”

ENABLERS

INNOVATIVE ACTION FROM COMMUNITY-LED ORGANIZATIONS

In New York State, only 139 OUT OF 57,865 farmers are Black, receiving 60% fewer government subsidies and support than white farmers. In 2019 farmers Karen Washington and Olivia Watkins created the BLACK FARMER FUND (BFF). Through financial support and technical training and assistance, they are repairing Black communities' ties to land and food. Their fight for financial inclusion and against environmental racism builds resilience to sudden and extreme weather events while promoting green and socially inclusive projects. This food ecosystem works as a collective to decenter the traditional top-down approach to food and climate policy in New York and build community power and resilience.

INVESTMENTS TO ENABLE CLIMATE READINESS

The New York City Council passed a bill to create the CLIMATE RESILIENCY PLAN in November 2021 to address the City's infrastructural vulnerabilities and lack of preparedness against future extreme weather conditions. The plan will build upon the numerous local and federal investments to strengthen the resiliency of the City's food supply in hopes to avoid future catastrophes like those seen during Hurricane Sandy and Ida. One such example is the \$71M INVESTMENT from the City and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to advance a resilient energy pilot and implement a coastal flood protection plan on Hunts Point. Hunts Point houses a regional food distribution center that provides 8,500 jobs and is responsible for dispensing over 4.5 billion pounds of food to the metropolitan area.

IMPROVING SUSTAINABILITY AND HEALTHINESS OF THE CITY'S FOOD SYSTEM

New York City spends \$500 million on food each year to feed over 100 million students, hospital patients, children, seniors, homeless, and incarcerated people. To implement a procurement strategy that drives positive change across NYC's food system, the City partnered with The Center of Food Purchasing to implement the GOOD FOOD PURCHASING PROGRAM in 2016. The City's top seven food purchasing agencies currently participate in the program. They are committed to improving their purchasing in the following categories: nutrition, local economies, valued workforce, environmental sustainability, and animal welfare. Additionally, New York City became the first city in the United States to join the COOL FOOD PLEDGE in 2021, a pledge to reduce the GHG emissions associated with the food served in public cafeterias by 25% by 2030. Through the pledge, NYC has been making significant progress in reducing meat and dairy GHG emissions specifically by launching “Meatless Mondays and Fridays” and “Plant Powered Fridays” across all New York City public schools, and a plant-based program to help the patients at NYC Health + Hospitals/Bellevue system transition to plant-based diets and healthier lifestyles.

BARRIERS

EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS INFLUENCE FOOD & CLIMATE LANDSCAPE

In 2009, the NYC Economic Development Corporation created the FOOD RETAIL EXPANSION TO SUPPORT HEALTH PROGRAM (FRESH) to provide incentives for grocers to locate in neighborhoods lacking access to healthy food. The spatial requirements for participating in FRESH present incentives for real estate developers but many barriers for grocers. Despite the positive intentions of these initiatives, rezoning land or building supermarkets in high-demand areas can shift the socioeconomic composition of neighborhoods which often leads to rent inflation and displacement of renters and small businesses. These residents and businesses – mostly low-income and communities of colour – are then forced into areas farther away from public transportation and have higher levels of air, water, and noise pollution, causing concern that revitalization efforts often perpetuate environmental racism. Former mayors Mike Bloomberg and Bill DeBlasio tried to build coalitions with real estate developers but often had to make concessions to these stakeholders, lessening the potential impact of initiatives to improve food security, housing affordability, and environmental justice. With the recent change in mayor, there is an opportunity for the new administration to change these dynamics to better serve the people of New York.

LATENT DISSATISFACTION WITH THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO COMMUNITY PROBLEMS

A new administration has the chance to make food and climate policy-making a more inclusive process. A 2018 EVALUATION found that there is still a need for greater community involvement in the design and implementation of environmentally sustainable policies. Through the iteration of Food Forward and OneNYC, the City has an opportunity to respond to local community concerns around a lack of community input into the policy-making process, and for the City to benefit from the creativity of community groups in addressing food and climate issues.

New York City has been working towards system reform through the implementation of numerous progressive food policies over the last decade. While Food Forward and the Climate Resiliency Plan outline the goals to be met on food and climate for the next ten years, opportunities still exist for more inclusive governance mechanisms. For example, the successful implementation of the Good Food Purchasing program relies on alignment across the regional food system, from production to processing and distribution. Therefore, as the push continues for more substantive change in New York City, continued collaboration and engagement across all levels of government will be necessary to transform its food system.

“Equity is the fundamental challenge we face in New York, in all areas including food.”

FACT BOX

- In 2011, the City established reporting requirements for the production, processing, distribution, and consumption of food in and for the City. This mandate led to the creation and annual publication of the FOOD METRICS REPORT. Food waste, a major focus of the report, helps to connect the City's overarching net-zero carbon target with its goals to improve the food system.
- The city's 10 year food plan, Food Forward NYC, was designed in response to the City Council's 2019 report GROWING FOOD EQUITY IN NEW YORK CITY and as a specialized initiative deriving from the City's strategic plan One NYC 2050.
- Mayor Eric Adams formalized the City's commitments to procuring, preparing, and serving healthy and nutritious food citywide through Executive Orders 8 and 9 in February 2022. To further enhance the City's procurement process, the New York State Legislature will need to pass legislation that provides municipalities with greater power on local reform.

