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The CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute contributes evidence to solve food problems facing cities.

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Other Versions
Two versions of this report are available on line. This, the long version, an estimated 2 to 3 hour read for those for whom food policy is a major part of their professional, civic, or intellectual responsibilities is available here and the Appendix is available here. The short version, a 30-40 minute read, for policy makers, advocates, students, and others with an active interest in food policy, is available here.

This report was written by Nicholas Freudenberg\textsuperscript{a}, Nevin Cohen\textsuperscript{b}, Jan Poppendieck\textsuperscript{c} and Craig Willingham\textsuperscript{d}.


This report is the second of a series of reports on food policy in New York City. Part 1 is available here: Willingham C, Rafalow A, Lindstrom L, Freudenberg N. The CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute Guide to Food Governance in New York City. CUNY Graduate School of Public Health and Healthy Policy, 2017.

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For more than a century, New York City has led the nation in using the authority and resources of municipal government to make healthy food, that most basic of human needs, more available, affordable and safer for all city residents. In this report, the CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute takes stock of what has changed in food policy in New York City since 2008. The goal is to provide evidence that can inform more equitable solutions to urban food problems in New York City and elsewhere.

Food Policy in New York City Since 2008: Lessons for the Next Decade seeks to answer several questions:

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the cumulative recommendations for food policy that New York City and State officials have made over the last decade?

2. To what extent have the policies monitored through the New York City Food Metrics report since 2012 been implemented? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this monitoring system?

3. What is the evidence on the implementation and impact of a broad array of public food policies that have been approved by New York City or State in the last decade?

4. How have key nutrition and health indicators for the New York City population changed over the last decade? What do these changes tell us about the success and limitations of current food policies?

To find answers to these questions, we reviewed four public sources of evidence. First, we identified all major reports on food and food policy prepared by New York City and State public officials or agencies between 2008 and 2017. We identified 20 such documents with 420 recommendations, which we classified into six broad categories based on their primary goals. These recommendations proposed city and state policies to: (1) improve nutritional well-being; (2) promote food security; (3) create food systems that support economic and community development; (4) ensure sustainable food systems; (5) support food workers; and (6) strengthen food governance and food democracy.

Second, we reviewed the six annual Food Metrics Reports produced by the Mayor’s Office of Food Policy between 2012 and 2017 as mandated by a 2011 City Council law. We describe the findings, strengths and weaknesses of these reports, and examine changes that might make the metrics more useful for improving food policy in New York.

Third, to broaden our understanding of the implementation of city and state food policies, we identified 40 major city and state food policies implemented in the last decade and summarized available data on their implementation and impact.

Finally, we reviewed public data on five key health and social outcomes to analyze changes in New York City in these indicators over the last decade: fruit and vegetable consumption, sugary beverage and soda consumption, rates of obesity and overweight, diagnoses of diabetes, and the number of individuals meeting the USDA definition for food insecurity. Our analysis seeks to determine time trends in these indicators rather than to attribute observed changes to any specific policy.

Each of our methods and sources of data has strengths and weaknesses. By using multiple sources of data, this report provides a comprehensive overview of food policy change in New York in the last decade. Together the evidence presented constitutes the most thorough analysis to date of the food policy landscape in New York City over the last 10 years.

Key Findings

Improving nutritional well-being has been the most consistent food policy goal of city and state public officials. Goals that could benefit from greater policy attention and more involvement of diverse constituencies include reducing food insecurity, protecting food workers, and strengthening food governance and food democracy.

The six annual Food Metrics Reports show measurable progress on 51% of the 37 indicators and sub-indicator that are monitored, providing some assurance that a bare majority of food initiatives that the New York City Council selected for monitoring are moving in the right direction. However, these reports could be more useful to the food planning process by including more data, presented in
ways that more clearly show progress or setbacks; disaggregating data geographically to enable communities to identify local problems; and made available in forms that facilitate further analysis by other public agencies, academics and advocates. Finally, most of the metrics chosen are outputs, not outcomes, limiting their value in determining whether monitored policies and programs are making a difference.

Our review of 40 policies that contributed to the six identified policy goals found that for each goal, a portfolio of city and state policies has been implemented over the last decade. For many, evidence demonstrates successful implementation. However, for the most part these policies and programs have not been designed or implemented on a scale likely to lead to meaningful changes in population or societal-level outcomes. These limitations point to the challenge of transforming food environments and reversing the many food-related problems that burden New York City residents and drive inequalities. The accomplishments in food policy to date do show that city and state governments can take action on food policy and implement policies that could lead to improvements in health if brought to scale and sustained and if design problems encountered in early implementation are addressed and partially solved.

The review of health and social outcomes over the last decade showed few or at best small increases in daily fruit and vegetable consumption, some reductions in sugary beverage consumption, persistently high rates of obesity and overweight with stable or widening inequitable distribution by race and ethnicity, modest increases in the proportion of New Yorkers ever diagnosed with diabetes and modest recent declines in the number and percentages of New Yorkers experiencing food insecurity. These findings suggest if New York City is to achieve meaningful improvements in food-related outcomes in the next decade, it will need to consider more than simply maintaining current efforts.

Recommendations

To develop feasible and transformative solutions to New York City’s food problems, we recommend:

1. Create a New York City Food Plan that charts five to ten year food policy goals for the city, state, and region.

2. Identify key outcomes and metrics for key food policy goals that can be used to monitor the food plan.

3. Focus New York City food policies and programs more explicitly on reducing socioeconomic and racial/ethnic inequities in food-related outcomes and link to city equity initiatives on housing, employment, education, climate change, and zoning.

4. Strengthen New York City’s public sector in food to better achieve public goals of reduced food insecurity and diet-related diseases and improved sustainability, food-related economic development, and improved pay, benefits and working conditions for food workers.

5. Create new democracy and governance processes that offer New Yorkers a greater voice in shaping their food environments.

6. Develop a collaborative food policy research and evaluation agenda that can fill gaps in knowledge and inform more effective and equitable food policy.
Today several factors make it an opportune time for New York City to consider its food policy goals for the next decade. In the last decade, food policies moved higher on the agendas of cities throughout North America and Europe, especially in New York City. This wave of new food initiatives has been in place for several years, making an assessment of their accomplishments and limitations timely. Beginning in January 2018, a re-elected Mayor and new and returning City Council members will decide their priorities for the coming years. Where will food policy fit in these evolving agendas and what will be the specific goals?

The need for charting food policy goals for New York City for the next period could not be more urgent. In 2018, New York City once again stands at the crossroads of two competing visions for food policy. The city’s efforts of the last 10 to 15 years, spurred in part by an emerging food justice movement, have strengthened the role of city government and the public sector in promoting nutritional health, reducing food insecurity, protecting the environment, and enhancing the status of food workers. In Washington, D.C., President Donald Trump and Congress are advancing a very different vision, one in which markets, not government, set food policy. In this view, transferring wealth to the affluent is a better spur to growth than re-distribution or enhanced safety net benefits. President Trump and the Republican majority in Congress have vowed to reduce SNAP and other public food benefits, cut back federal regulation of our food supply, repeal recently enacted consumer education and protection rules, and rescind food worker wage and safety protections. They have passed a sweeping tax bill that will redistribute income from the poor and the middle class to the wealthy. These proposed changes could harm many New Yorkers, including the 20 percent who rely on SNAP, the million or so children who eat school lunch, and all those who depend on the FDA enforcing food safety rules vigorously.

In the coming decade, will New York join other cities and states to protect these programs, setting the stage for national debates on food policy in 2018 and 2020? Or will the city’s innovations in food policy of the last decade be rolled back, serving only as a nostalgic memory of what city and state government and food movements can accomplish together? By carefully considering the lessons from the city’s experiences in changing food policy in the last decade or so, New Yorkers can gain insights that can guide our choices in the years to come.

For more than a century, New York City has led the nation in using the authority and resources of municipal government to make healthy food, that most basic of human needs, more available, affordable, and safer for all city residents. By 1914, the New York City Health Department had established 55 free milk stations to distribute free pasteurized milk to new mothers, helping to bring about significant reductions in the city’s high infant death rate. At about the same time, the city established a dozen or so indoor public food markets to make healthy fresh food available and affordable in working class neighborhoods.

During the Great Depression, New York City expanded its school lunch program, helping hundreds of thousands of New York City children and their families avoid hunger and malnutrition. In 1964, Congress passed the Food Stamp Act to reduce the hunger long associated with poverty. With its high rates of low-income households and food insecurity, New York City led the nation in enrolling eligible families. Today, more than 1.25 million low-income New Yorkers receive benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (the current name for Food Stamps), providing a key safeguard against hunger and malnutrition.

In the first decade of this century, New York City and other cities throughout North America and Europe recognized that smart food policies could improve the health of the city, shrink economic inequality, and improve environmental conditions. During this period, New York City embarked on an ambitious effort to modify its food policies to attain these public goals. New York City and State developed initiatives to reduce obesity, diabetes and other diet-related diseases, and decrease hunger and food insecurity, long one of the most debilitating consequences of urban poverty.

Public officials also sought to increase the potential for growth and sustainability of the city’s growing food sector, find new ways to promote health and self-sufficiency, save tax payer dollars and contribute to a more equitable city. Encouraged and pressured by growing movements of health professionals, community leaders, and food and social justice advocates, the city and state government proposed, enacted, and began to implement many new food policies.

Today several factors make it an opportune time for New York City to consider its food policy goals for the next decade. In the last decade, food policies moved higher on the agendas of cities throughout North America and Europe, especially in New York City. This wave of new food initiatives has been in place for several years, making an assessment of their accomplishments and limitations timely. Beginning in January 2018, a re-elected Mayor and new and returning City Council members will decide their priorities for the coming years. Where will food policy fit in these evolving agendas and what will be the specific goals?

The need for charting food policy goals for New York City for the next period could not be more urgent. In 2018, New York City once again stands at the crossroads of two competing visions for food policy. The city’s efforts of the last 10 to 15 years, spurred in part by an emerging food justice movement, have strengthened the role of city government and the public sector in promoting nutritional health, reducing food insecurity, protecting the environment, and enhancing the status of food workers. In Washington, D.C., President Donald Trump and Congress are advancing a very different vision, one in which markets, not government, set food policy. In this view, transferring wealth to the affluent is a better spur to growth than re-distribution or enhanced safety net benefits. President Trump and the Republican majority in Congress have vowed to reduce SNAP and other public food benefits, cut back federal regulation of our food supply, repeal recently enacted consumer education and protection rules, and rescind food worker wage and safety protections. They have passed a sweeping tax bill that will redistribute income from the poor and the middle class to the wealthy. These proposed changes could harm many New Yorkers, including the 20 percent who rely on SNAP, the million or so children who eat school lunch, and all those who depend on the FDA enforcing food safety rules vigorously.

In the coming decade, will New York join other cities and states to protect these programs, setting the stage for national debates on food policy in 2018 and 2020? Or will the city’s innovations in food policy of the last decade be rolled back, serving only as a nostalgic memory of what city and state government and food movements can accomplish together? By carefully considering the lessons from the city’s experiences in changing food policy in the last decade or so, New Yorkers can gain insights that can guide our choices in the years to come.
A few definitions and qualifications are needed. Food policy means more than laws and regulations that govern food; it includes all public decisions affecting food. Thus, the term “food policy” refers to legislation, executive orders, rule changes, demonstration projects, program expansion or elimination, capital investments and budget allocations, grant programs, reporting requirements, certifications and enforcement, and government agency rules and regulations. And because government plans frame issues and direct attention to problems and solutions, food plans are policies, too. Together these documents and decisions and their implementation constitute the food policy landscape in New York.

Food policy emerges not just from government structures, but also reflects governance, the roles that civil society, businesses, communities and residents play in shaping government responses to public problems. Our previous report, The CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute Guide to Food Governance in New York City described the changes in food governance over the last decade.

While we recognize that this landscape is shaped by the actions of state and federal government as well as city government, our focus in this report is on the municipal level. Our brief examinations of state and federal policies look at their influence on the city’s policy implementation. We also understand that many other forces have an impact on food policy: global, national, and local food businesses; trade associations and professional groups; social movements and community organizations. Our report considers some of the ways these groups have interacted with and influenced city food policies, but our primary focus is on the actions of city and state government.

While our report describes policies that have been implemented and results that have been documented, we have not collected new data on their impact nor evaluated the broader effects of individual policies on outcomes like population health, equity, or the environment. Nor do we attempt to compare the effects of different policies, particularly since their scope, scale, and time frame differ quite a lot. We hope this report will set the stage for these types of urgently needed studies. Despite its limitations, this report constitutes the most thorough analysis to date of the food policy landscape in New York City over the last 10 years.

The goal of this report is to answer the following questions:

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the cumulative recommendations for food policy that New York City and State officials have made over the last decade?

2. To what extent have the policies monitored through the New York City Food Metrics Reports since 2012 been implemented? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this monitoring system?

3. What is the evidence on the implementation and impact of a broad array of public food policies that have been approved by New York City or State in the last decade?

4. How have key nutrition and health indicators for the New York City population changed over the last decade? What do these changes tell us about the success and limitations of current food policies?

Ultimately, our goal is to provide insights and evidence that can help policy makers, public officials, health and food professionals, researchers, and activists better contribute to the development of food policy priorities for New York City for the next decade and guide future scientific studies on the impact of food policy in New York. In addition, by providing a concise summary of where food policy in New York stands at the beginning of 2018, we hope to establish a baseline that can be used to assess progress in the coming years.

Methods

To answer these questions, we collected and analyzed four sources of public evidence. These included:

1. A review of the recommendations made in 20 major public reports on food policy produced by city and state elected officials in the last decade, from 2008 to 2017.

2. A review and analysis of the six annual Food Metrics Reports prepared by the Mayor’s Office between 2012 and 2017.

3. A summary of available evidence on the implementation and
impact of 40 major city or state food policies and programs implemented in New York City between 2005 and 2017.

4. Data collected by New York City, state, or the national government on changes in the last decade or so on a few key outcomes of food policy initiatives including the number of people in New York City reporting food insecurity, fruit and vegetable and sugary beverage consumption, obesity, and diagnose of diabetes.

Each of these data sources has its strengths and weaknesses, summarized in Table A in the Appendix to this report. By using multiple sources of data, this report provides a comprehensive overview of food policy change in New York City and State in the last decade and overcomes some of the limitations of each individual source. Moreover, by weighing the public evidence that is available now, rather than waiting for the evidence that can come only from more rigorous, lengthy – and expensive – studies, we offer findings that can accelerate the process of developing food policy priorities for the next decade and inform future scientific studies on the impact of food policy in New York City and State.

Background

The starting point of our report is a decade of food policy action in New York City. To remind readers who have been part of this process and familiarize those new to food policy in New York City and State, we present a timeline of key events, starting in 2001, the year Michael Bloomberg was elected Mayor, seven years before our decade of interest and ending with 2017.

Time Line of Significant Events Related to Food Policy In New York City, 2000-2017

Note: Shaded portion covered in this report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Political and other Events</th>
<th>Food Policy or Program Approved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>World Trade Center attack</td>
<td>New York City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Michael Bloomberg elected Mayor</td>
<td>New York State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Michael Bloomberg re-elected Mayor</td>
<td>Health Bucks pilots in South Bronx, then expands to Brooklyn and Harlem and EBT benefit added (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Mayor Bloomberg releases PlaNYC, a 25-year plan to prepare city for meeting environmental and economic challenges; does not include food</td>
<td>Healthy Bodegas launched</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Mayor Bloomberg’s Office hires first Food Policy Coordinator</td>
<td>NYC Mayor’s Office hires first Food Policy Coordinator</td>
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<td></td>
<td>First restrictions on trans fat in New York City</td>
<td>Governor Elliot Spitzer creates New York State Food Policy Council</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Global financial crisis begins</td>
<td>Green Cart program established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Barack Obama elected President</td>
<td>Calorie posting required in NYC chain food service outlets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NYC Food Standards for institutional food approve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This report covers ten shaded years</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings

Each of our four sources of data provides evidence to inform our understanding of the accomplishments and limitations of food policy initiatives of the last decade. Table 1 summarizes findings on the distribution of the six broad food policy goals that we used to classify recommendations and policy implementation across three sources of data. Throughout the report, we assigned each policy recommendation or policy to one of the six primary policy goals listed in the first column of Table 1, using the language from the relevant policy document and our own judgement of the main impact of the policy to make this assignment. We recognize that many policies contribute to two or more goals and in our discussion on outcomes and our recommendations, we discuss these intersections more fully.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Michael Bloomberg re-elected Mayor</td>
<td>Pouring on the Pounds campaign launches to raise awareness of sugary beverages health harms City Council approves FRESH NYC DOHMH creates National Salt Reduction Initiative Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer releases the report Food in the Public Interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Let's Move!</td>
<td>City Council Speaker Christine Quinn releases report Food-Works: A Vision to Improve NYC's Food System Governor David Paterson proposes, then withdraws, a penny an ounce tax on sugary beverages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>NYC announces it will apply to USDA for waiver to restrict SNAP use for sugary beverages, a request USDA turns down Mayor convenes an obesity task force, Grow to Learn, a NYC school gardening initiative is created, NYC extends license agreements for community gardens for 4 years, NYC issues Local Food Procurement Guidelines for city agencies, Mayor Bloomberg releases revised PlanNYC: A Greener, Greater New York that includes food goals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Barack Obama elected President</td>
<td>Pouring on the Pounds campaign launches to raise awareness of sugary beverages health harms City Council approves FRESH NYC DOHMH creates National Salt Reduction Initiative Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer releases the report Food in the Public Interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Bill de Blasio elected Mayor</td>
<td>NYC launches Food Waste Challenge and curbside composting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Mayor de Blasio releases OneNYC: The Plan for a Strong and Just City identifying strategies for reducing inequalities in several areas including food</td>
<td>NYC mandates sodium warning labels on chain restaurant menus, NYC and anti-hunger organizations create NYC Food Assistance collaborative, Breakfast in the Classroom expands to 143 schools, NYC invests $150 million over 10 years to revitalize Hunts Point Produce Market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Donald Trump elected President</td>
<td>NYC requires grocery store owners to retain employees for 90 days if ownership changes NYC requires employers to notify fast food and other retail workers of scheduled hours and paycheck dates in advance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Bill de Blasio re-elected Mayor</td>
<td>Universal Free Lunch approved for New York City public schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Bill de Blasio re-elected Mayor</td>
<td>NYC requires grocery store owners to retain employees for 90 days if ownership changes NYC requires employers to notify fast food and other retail workers of scheduled hours and paycheck dates in advance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONTINUED >
What recommendations have New York City and State elected officials made to improve food policy in New York City in the last decade? To answer this question, we compiled the major reports prepared by city and state elected officials between 2008 and 2017. Through internet searches, City Council and New York State legislative databases, and our prior knowledge, we identified 20 reports, listed below in Table 1.1. Eighteen of these reports made a total of 420 recommendations. Of these 18, 12 documents were produced by New York City officials: six were assessments of one sector of food policy, three were broad food policy planning documents and three were more comprehensive planning documents that included a section on food. Of the six reports produced by state officials, three were broad reviews of state policy on food, one was a more general planning document that included recommendations on food policy, and two addressed specific food

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Goal</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>20 Public Reports (% of 420 recommendations)</th>
<th>Food Metrics (% of 37 indicators)</th>
<th>Top 40 (% of 40 policies)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Improve nutritional well-being. Policies that promote health and reduce diet-related diseases</td>
<td></td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Promote food security. Policies that reduce hunger and food insecurity and provide the quality and quantity of food needed to maintain health</td>
<td></td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Create food systems that support economic &amp; community development. Policies that promote community economic development through food and improve food production and distribution in the region</td>
<td></td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Ensure sustainable food system. Policies that reduce food waste and food-related pollution and carbon emissions and protect the region’s farmland</td>
<td></td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Support Food Workers. Policies that provide food workers with decent wages and benefits, safe working conditions and the right to organize</td>
<td></td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Strengthen food governance and food democracy. Policies that encourage civic engagement in shaping food policy and reduce the influence of special interests</td>
<td></td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Image Credit: CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute
problems. Many reports had significant input from civil society groups.

Our goal was to document and analyze the food policy recommendations made in these reports and to classify them by goal and sponsor (e.g., city or state). By creating an inventory of these recommendations, we could describe the distribution of recommendations and create a database that could subsequently be used to track which were enacted and implemented and which were not.

Through a content analysis of these 420 recommendations, we created six broad conceptually distinct goals for food policy, shown in Table 1.2, each illustrated with an icon. Throughout this report, we use these six broad goals to analyze the distribution of recommendations and policies:

1. Improving nutritional well-being,
2. Promoting food security,
3. Creating food systems that support economic and community development,
4. Ensuring sustainable food systems,
5. Supporting food workers, and
6. Strengthening food governance and food democracy – as a framework for presenting our findings.

Many policy recommendations contribute to one or more goals. For example, improving school food can contribute to goals (1), (2), (4) and (5) above. By making nutritious healthy food more available to school children, reducing food insecurity among children, reducing waste in school food programs, and creating well-paying jobs with benefits for school food workers, New York City’s school food program, a frequent focus for food policy change in the last decade, promotes healthier food environments in multiple ways. In our assignment of policy recommendations to the policy goals and sub-goals shown in Table 2, we sought to determine the primary purpose of the recommendations as expressed in the policy report in which they were made. We acknowledge this required subjective judgments. Future studies could consider assigning policy recommendations to all goals and sub-goals to which they contribute.

A review of Table 1.2 shows considerable variation in the distribution of city and state policy makers’ recommendations by goal and sub-goal. Two of the six goals, creating food systems that support community and economic development (28 percent of recommendations) and ensure sustainable food systems (26 percent), accounted for more than half the recommendations. Both goals emphasize characteristics of the food system rather than its direct impact on individuals. Two other goals, supporting food workers and strengthening food governance and food democracy, each accounted for only four percent of recommendations, perhaps showing the extent to which these goals have only recently been added to the food policy agenda and the extent to which they have been considered to fall outside the purview of city policy.
Of the 27 sub-goals listed in Table 1.2, 10 (marked with an asterisk on the table) account for 75 percent of the recommendations. The number of recommendations is at best an indirect measure of the importance of an issue to city and state policy makers or the magnitude of impact. Nevertheless, these 10 sub-goals include four of the six broader policy goals – improve nutritional well-being; promote food security; create food systems that support economic and community development; and ensure sustainable food systems. The frequency of their appearance suggests that a cross-section of city and state policy makers consider the strategies proposed in these sub-goals to be plausible and feasible policies to address major food policy goals. In addition, the 10 most proposed sub-goals have the potential to contribute to several of the six food policy goals we identified.

Achieving the top ranked sub-goal, improving the city’s food infrastructure, for example, could contribute to addressing four of the six goals.

While the recommendations vary in their specificity and scope, it is fair to argue that over the last decade, city and state policy makers have implicitly articulated a broad and comprehensive food policy agenda. To avoid the time-consuming task of re-inventing a comprehensive food policy agenda, public officials, advocates, and others could use this implicit agenda as a starting point for defining an explicit food plan for New York City with specific measurable goals, a robust monitoring plan and ongoing mechanisms for democratic participation. By converting a vague agenda into a specific plan, New York City could begin to plan strategic actions and monitor progress toward improvements in food and nutrition outcomes. Moreover, the New York City Charter requires a public review and vote on a plan, but provides no mechanism for adopting a report or agenda, thus giving plans an added credibility and utility as a tool for action.

What accounts for the differential emphasis on the first four goals in Table 1.2 compared to the last two? One possibility is that the frequency of recommendations reflects the priorities of previous and current Mayors and City Council leaders. Michael Bloomberg, who...
served as Mayor from 2002 to 2013, and Christine Quinn who served as City Council Speaker from 2006 to 2013, focused on nutrition, obesity, and sustainability. In their many years in office, they had an opportunity to propose policies and programs to address these concerns. Mayor Bill de Blasio and former city council speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, have emphasized the needs of low wage workers, including food workers, health and other inequalities, and the adverse consequences of poverty. Whether these priorities will gain greater attention in the next four years remains to be seen.

Another possibility is that while activists and policy makers in New York City and State have long been interested in the relationship between poverty and hunger and food security, the food movement that emerged in New York City in the first decade of this century has only recently taken on a more systematic and sustained interest in hunger, food workers, and food democracy. While food insecurity has long been of concern in New York City, until recently it was seen primarily as a poverty issue, not a nutrition or food issue. Thus, the lower level of attention to these issues may reflect the need for additional education of policy makers, advocacy, and community mobilization on these issues and stronger efforts to integrate the disparate concerns of the food movement.

Our analysis of 420 recommendations for food policy in New York City and state made in 20 reports released by public officials in city and state government in the last decade led to several conclusions.

### Table 1.2 Recommendations from 20 policy reports

**Between 2008 and 2017, New York City and State officials released 20 reports that made 420 specific recommendations for food policies, programs, or public actions. Here is a breakdown of what they recommended. **

#### Top 10 ranked sub-goals

| Policy Goal 1. Improve nutritional well-being | Number of Recommendations (%)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policies that promote health and reduce diet-related diseases</td>
<td>107 (25%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Sub-Goals:

| Sub-Goal | Number of Recommendations (%)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1A. Increase number of food outlets selling or distributing healthy and affordable food in underserved neighborhoods</td>
<td>35 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1B. Improve quality and make healthy food and beverages more available in municipal institutions</td>
<td>24 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1C. Improve and expand nutrition education and nutrition promotion programs in schools, communities, and workplaces</td>
<td>21 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1D. Reduce marketing and/or availability of unhealthy food</td>
<td>13 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1E. Improve reach and facilitate enrollment in NYC institutional food programs</td>
<td>6 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1F. Other recommendations to improve nutritional well-being</td>
<td>5 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1G. Facilitate health care providers role in increasing access to healthy food</td>
<td>3 (3%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Policy Goal 2. Promote food security

**Policies that reduce hunger and food insecurity and provide the quality and quantity of food needed to maintain health**

| Policy | Number of Recommendations (%)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2A. Promote and/or facilitate enrollment in SNAP, other food benefits and emergency food programs</td>
<td>27 (49%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2B. Improve food and nutrition education in programs serving the food insecure</td>
<td>10 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2C. Increase food buying power of low-income NYC residents</td>
<td>9 (16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2D. Increase quality and supply of food going to food pantries and soup kitchens and other emergency food programs</td>
<td>5 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2E. Other recommendations to promote food security</td>
<td>4 (7%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONTINUED >
### Policy Goal 3. Create food systems that support economic & community development
*Policies that promote community economic development through food and improve production in the region*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Goals</th>
<th>Number of Recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3A. Improve city’s food production and distribution infrastructure</td>
<td>48 (41%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3B. Promote and support urban agriculture and community gardens</td>
<td>46 (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3C. Provide and promote incentives and reduce barriers to food businesses or farmers to increase profitability</td>
<td>19 (16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3D. Other recommendations to support economic and community development</td>
<td>3 (3%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Policy Goal 4. Ensure sustainable food systems
*Policies that reduce food waste and food-related pollution and carbon emissions and protect the region's farmland*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Goals</th>
<th>Number of Recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4A. Increase demand for local and regional food</td>
<td>35 (32%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4B. Promote and support urban agriculture and community gardens</td>
<td>34 (31%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4C. Provide and promote incentives and reduce barriers to food businesses or farmers to increase profitability</td>
<td>24 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4D. Other recommendations to support economic and community development</td>
<td>10 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4E. Other recommendations to support economic and community development</td>
<td>7 (6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Policy Goal 5. Support Food Workers
*Policies that provide food workers with decent wages and benefits, safe working conditions, and the right to organize*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Goals</th>
<th>Number of Recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5A. Create food workforce development programs</td>
<td>6 (35%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5B. Improve pay and benefits for food workers</td>
<td>5 (29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5C. Protect legal rights and health and safety of food workers</td>
<td>4 (23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5D. Other recommendations to support food workers</td>
<td>2 (12%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Policy Goal 6. Strengthen food governance and food democracy
*Policies that encourage civic engagement in shaping food policy and reduce the influence of special interests*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Goals</th>
<th>Number of Recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6A. Improve city government planning, coordination and assessment of food policy</td>
<td>11 (73%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6B. Increase resident/community participation in food policy and food governance</td>
<td>4 (27%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONTINUED >
Conclusions from Study of Recommendations in 20 Policy Reports

First, these reports constitute a valuable inventory of cumulative policy recommendations. We hope that public officials, advocates, and other scholars find ways to strengthen and improve the food policy database we created to build on previous recommendations, avoid duplication of effort, and strive for food policy coherence.

Second, our review of these documents shows some progress in expanding who sits at the table to set food policy. Several of the documents included feedback and participation from civil society and community groups. But given the multiple influences on food policy, policy makers, and advocates would benefit from bringing more voices of the public and additional technical and content expertise more fully into the policy-making process. Other constituencies to include are community leaders and residents, urban planners, workforce developers, agricultural specialists, educators, and health professionals. Food policy that emerges from the experience of multiple constituencies and is “owned” by those who have participated in shaping it can enlist more political and implementation support than policies that lack such engagement.

Third, while we recognize and laud the growing concern about food insecurity among city and state public officials and food advocates, our review of the reports and recommendations suggest that policies with nutritional goals are more often proposed than food security goals.

Further integration of the goals and strategies for improving nutritional well-being and reducing food insecurity would benefit a wide cross-section of New Yorkers. In the past, improving food security and enhancing nutrition were viewed as separate goals, attended to by different city and state agencies. As both food insecurity and diet-related diseases related to over-consumption of unhealthy food become concentrated in low-income populations, developing and implementing policies that create local food environments that simultaneously reduce these two indicators of growing inequality is an important priority.

In practice, the six goals reinforce each other. Elucidating the connections between, for example, reducing food insecurity, improving nutritional well-being, creating food systems that support economic and community development, and protecting food workers may help to re-balance priorities. Ending hunger and persistent food insecurity in New York is a feasible goal; more concentrated attention from policy makers and advocates on its root causes will be needed to achieve this aim.

Another policy goal that requires additional attention is supporting food workers. A food system that depends on low wage labor, that fails to protect the health and safety of its workers, and in which many food workers are themselves food insecure is not sustainable or moral. This issue has received growing attention from city and state policy makers and advocates, but more progress is achievable and needed.

Finally, the lack of attention to food policy governance and food democracy constitutes a weakness of the body of recommendations we identified. The emphasis on achieving meaningful policy goals that lead to concrete improvements in food outcomes, systems, and environments is sometimes used as a rationale for focusing on content rather than process. While we share the desire for timely results, failure to develop formal and informal processes for rational food policy-making puts the entire enterprise at risk. The transformative changes in food policy that are needed to address New York City’s most serious food problems will require strong support from a broad cross-section of the public if they are to make it through the gauntlet of special interests that often block such changes.

Downplaying the need for nurturing the democratic processes that can build such support to achieve incremental top-down policy wins risks missing opportunities for addressing fundamental causes of food problems. The challenge for policy makers and advocates is to find the optimal mix of these two approaches, a mix that produces both incremental changes and sets the stage for transformative ones.

This is especially true during transitional periods like changes in administrations. By fully engaging those who experience directly the harms of our current food system into the policy process, policy makers, and advocates can benefit from powerful new constituencies for effective reform. While these problems of democracy affect other urban sectors such as housing and education, using food policy to promote democratic reforms has the potential to mobilize diverse constituencies often excluded from the policy process.
Part 2
Lessons from the Food Metrics Reports

Our review of public food policy reports in Part 1 assessed the changes that city and state officials recommended over the last decade. Part 1 does not, however, provide evidence on what was implemented or on the impact these of these policies. In the next two parts, we turn to those questions.

In 2011, the New York City Council passed Local Law 52 that established reporting requirements for a variety of city food initiatives. Before then, there was no compendium of data on the food system, making it difficult to track changes or for the City Council to provide oversight to ensure that the policies passed were being implemented. Since 2012, the annual Food Metrics Reports have provided a snapshot of data from those programs initiated through FoodWorks, the 2010 report from the City Council Speaker. To some extent, the reports also provide evidence needed to track trends over time. Food Metrics Reports have expanded to include a broad range of city programs and initiatives to address food insecurity; improve city food procurement and food service, increase healthy food access and awareness, and support a more sustainable and just food system. In this section, we use data from the six New York City Food Metrics Reports released by the Mayor’s Office between 2012 and 2017, to answer the following questions:

1. What progress has the city made on the indicators the metrics monitor?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the Food Metrics Reports?
3. How could the Food Metrics reporting process be strengthened to provide more useful evidence for informing future food policy in New York City?

The Food Metrics Reports include data on 19 indicators and 18 sub-indicators, as shown in Table B in the Appendix and summarized below in Table 2.1, separated into five of the previously identified broad policy goals. The Food Metrics Reports do not directly address the sixth goal, strengthening food governance and food democracy, although their existence reflects the City Council’s effort to make data available for public decision-making. As a City Council staff report on Local Law 52 observed, “in order to adequately monitor and address the challenges facing New York City’s food system, policymakers, and members of the public must have access to full and accurate information.”
**Table 2.1. Distribution of Food Metrics Indicators by Goals and Direction of Change**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Goals</th>
<th>Number of Indicators</th>
<th>Improvements in indicator</th>
<th>Declines in indicator</th>
<th>No change in indicator</th>
<th>Not reported</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Improve nutritional well-being Policies that promote health and reduce diet-related diseases</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Promote food security Policies that reduce hunger and food insecurity and provide the quality and quantity of food needed to maintain health</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Create food systems that support economic &amp; community development Policies that promote community economic development through food and improve food production and distribution in region</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Ensure sustainable food systems Policies that reduce food waste and food-related pollution and carbon emissions and protect the region’s farmland</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Support Food Workers Policies that provide food workers with decent wages and benefits, safe working conditions, and the right to organize</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>37</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**What progress do the reports show on food metric indicators?**

Overall, Table 2.1 shows that of the 37 separate indicators that the Food Policy Metrics Reports tracked between 2012 and 2017, 51 percent showed improvement, 40 percent showed worsening, often by small amounts, one indicator did not change and two were not assessed. To make this determination, we assessed the change between 2012 and 2017 for each indicator. When data were not reported for 2012, we used the earliest subsequent year available for comparison. For each indicator, we determined whether the observed change represented improvement, decline, no change, or no assessment. We used the intent of the policy instrument that authorized the program or policy to make this classification. When two investigators disagreed about the classification, we discussed the assignment to reach consensus. In some cases, we made arbitrary decisions about how to classify observed changes. For example, the number of food and beverage vending machines in New York City public schools declined slightly and the revenues from these machines declined by 16 percent, changes we considered an improvement since the plausible alternative to vending machines was healthier fare served in the cafeteria. However, no data are available to confirm or refute this hypothesis.

A review of selected indicators by policy goal illustrates the range of changes that the reports document.

On the goal of improving nutritional well-being, progress was reported on several indicators measuring increased access to healthy food and decreased access to unhealthy products.

- Between 2012 and 2017, FRESH approved 27 new supermarkets and 14 were completed.
- The number of bodegas participating in Shop Healthy increased from 161 to 1,117.
- In both 2012 and 2017, the compliance rate with New York City food standards was more than 90 percent.
- Spending on three New York City Department of Health (DOH) nutrition education/food access programs (Stellar Farmers’ Markets, Eat Well Play Hard and Nutrition Education at District Public Health Office (DPHO)) increased significantly...
and the number of people reached increased modestly.

- Salad bars were installed in all New York City schools by 2016, with the number of salad bars increasing by 38 percent in six years.

On these food access indicators, no progress or deterioration was reported:

- Number of meals and snacks served in the city’s institutional food programs declined by 11 percent. Further analysis is required to interpret the causes of this decline. A reduction in the city’s jail population, for example, to most observers a desirable outcome, might lead to a reduction in meals served. While a reduction in the number of meals served in senior centers might indicate a growing unmet need or that the meals are unappealing to seniors. Most public institutional food programs enroll only a portion of those eligible.

- Number of Green Cart permits declined by 37 percent between 2012 and 2017, while Green Cart with EBTs increased by 14 percent. However, between 2016 and 2017, the number of Green Cart with EBTs fell sharply.

- The number of farmers market and Greenmarket locations fell slightly.

The Food Metrics Reports did not provide data on changes in enrollments rates of those eligible in SNAP or school food nor on the total number of new supermarkets opened between 2012 and 2017. Such data will be available next year and is reported separately in the New York City Health Department’s Community Health Profiles, a good example of the lack of a single source for all food-related data. Between 2007 and 2011, 168 new grocery stores opened in New York City.

In sum, 10 of the 21 metrics assessing changes in programs designed to enhance nutritional well-being showed positive changes, eight showed a decline, one showed no change and two were not assessed. In Part 4 of this report, we turn to other sources of data to assess changes in health and nutritional well-being, and other outcomes not assessed in the Food Metrics Reports.

Of the three indicators assessing food security initiatives, all showed some progress since 2012:

- Number of seniors getting SNAP benefits increased by 25 percent
- Number of sites providing SNAP enrollment services increased by 45 percent, although there was no change in spending on this function
- Number of SNAP recipients receiving nutrition education between 2012 and 2015 increased 14-fold and spending on this increased by 10 percent. No information is available on the procedures used to count participants.

Of note, the number of participants in SNAP declined between 2013 and 2017, probably because of improvements in the economy. This decline is discussed more fully in Part 4.

Several measures included in the nutritional well-being section may also contribute to reducing food insecurity, including the number of Green Carts accepting EBTs, the device that allows them to accept SNAP, and the number of FRESH supermarkets opened in under-served neighborhoods.

In 2014, as a result of a 2013 City Council law, the first Food Metrics Report released by the de Blasio administration added data on the number of New York City residents reported to be food insecure by the Feeding America Survey. In 2012, this report showed that 1.4 million New York City residents (17.4 percent of the population) were food insecure. The “Meal Gap”, the meals missing from the homes of families and individuals struggling with food insecurity, was reported as 250 million meals. The 2017 Report, using data from the 2015 Feeding America Survey, reported that 1.2 million New Yorkers (14.9 percent of the population) were food insecure and the Meal Gap was 224.8 million meals. Between 2012 and 2015, the rate of food insecurity fell by 14 percent and the number of
missing meals fell by 10 percent, both significant achievements that reduced the pernicious effects of poverty in New York City. See Part 4 for more discussion of changes in rates of food insecurity in New York City.

The two indicators assessing the contribution of food programs to community and economic development showed:

- Thirty-two percent increase in the number of community gardens on city-owned property.
- No significant change in the dollar amount awarded to food manufacturers by the New York City Economic Development Corporation or the Industrial Development Agency.

Of the four indicators that assess progress towards a more sustainable food system, the report showed:

- A five percent decrease in the number of farms participating in the Department of Environmental Protection’s (DEP) watershed agricultural program in 2017 compared to 2012, a six percent increase in the number of acres covered and a 41 percent increase in annual spending on financial support for participating farms.
- Total New York City Department of Education funding for regional food products increased by nine percent.
- Eighty percent decline in the number of daily truck trips to or through Hunter Point Market and a 45 percent decline in daily rail trips.

However, the indicator on sales of bottled water for city agencies showed:

- Spending on large size bottles declined by 65 percent, while spending on single serve containers increased by 35 percent.

This suggests fewer water deliveries but more use of disposable plastic bottles. This is an example of why choosing the right indicator (e.g., pounds of disposable plastic water bottles purchased) is critical to understanding the overall impact of reported changes.

The one indicator on supporting food workers showed:

- A fourfold increase in the number of Small Business Service trainings for food workers. However, only a tiny fraction of city food workers received training.

More broadly, on the goal of improving nutritional well-being, the number of outlets selling healthy food increased, almost all the food served in institutional meals programs was reported to meet the city’s nutritional standards, and spending on nutrition education increased. On the other hand, fewer people were consuming institutional food, fewer Green Carts were on the streets, and the number of farmers markets did not increase. The observed progress demonstrates that city policy can bring about changes in food environments to make healthy food and nutrition education more available, but in our view these changes in the last six years are by themselves unlikely to have achieved the scale of change needed to bring about changes in health outcomes. We’ll examine other evidence on this question in Part 4.

On the goal of promoting food security, the city succeeded in enrolling more seniors in SNAP, increased SNAP enrollment activities, and expanded nutrition education for SNAP recipients all noteworthy achievements. SNAP enrollment in New York City has declined, however, probably due to reductions in poverty. Moreover, as reported, between 2002 and 2015, the rate of food insecurity and the number of missing meals fell, impressive achievements that are in part a policy success.

Progress towards creating food systems that supported community and economic development showed an increase in the number of community gardens on city-owned property, but no change in funding awarded to food manufacturers. In our view, the two indicators presented do not allow an assessment of city progress in
What are the strengths and weaknesses of the Food Metrics Reports?

The Food Metrics Reports provide valuable data for understanding the implementation of city food initiatives. They provide the only compendium of food data published by the city and provide important evidence for an assessment of progress in implementing selected food policies approved in New York City and State over the last decade or so. As such, the Food Metrics Reports are an important step forward in food policy planning. That Food Metrics Reports show measurable progress on 51 percent of the indicators provides assurance that a bare majority of the measures of implementation of food initiatives are moving in the right direction. The findings on lack of progress also provide useful evidence that can be used to target areas for future policy efforts.

The fact of the reports and their findings are a tribute to the determined efforts of two Mayoral Administrations and the City Council to improve food policy in New York City. The accomplishments also warrant acknowledgement of the consistent advocacy, education, policy monitoring, and community mobilization for more effective and equitable food policies by a variety of community organizations, civic groups, and the emerging New York City food movement.

But the Food Metrics Reports as implemented also have significant limitations. They provide a somewhat haphazard view of city food policy. Based on a review of the six reports, readers would be hard pressed to make summary judgements about whether food policy in the New York City was moving in the right direction or whether the policies monitored were having the impact that policy makers intended. The lack of analysis by geography in the reports precludes their use by civic leaders who want to compare their neighborhoods to other city neighborhoods. Most indicators lack denominators for the population to be served, preventing their use to assess the reach of existing programs. For example, knowing the number of school lunches served in a year without knowing the number of children enrolled makes it difficult to track progress in serving eligible children. The metrics do not include numerous sources of public data on food, hindering policy makers and advocates from using the full range of data that are collected to inform policy making.

These gaps in the Food Metrics Reports stem from its origins in
City Council legislation and are mostly the result of economic, organizational, and political decisions made in 2011 when Local Law 52 was enacted. All these problems are amenable to correction and in the next section we suggest some direction for such modifications.

**How could those concerned about food policy better use the data reported?**

As we have noted, the Food Metrics Reports provide a wealth of data for assessing implementation of food policies and programs in New York City. Despite the shortcomings we identify, they constitute a valuable starting point for those concerned about food policy in New York City. Although the Mayor’s Office of Food Policy has primary responsibility for collecting, analyzing, and reporting on food metrics, it is not reasonable for a small office with limited staff and resources to have sole responsibility for this substantial effort. Thus, it makes sense to ask what other city and state agencies, nonprofit organizations, food justice groups, and academics can do to strengthen the Food Metrics Reports and enhance their contribution to improved food policy. To improve the food metrics process in New York City, we encourage discussion of our six recommendations.

1. **Include denominators as well as numerators for relevant metrics.**

   Few of the indicators provide a denominator that allows the reader to interpret the significance of the change reported. Indicator 1, for example, reports the number of farms and their acreage participating in the DEP watershed agricultural programs, but not the total acreage of farmland in the region or state. Other evidence shows that the acreage protected since 2012 accounts for only a small fraction of the farmland in these watersheds.

2. **Select additional indicators.**

   In 2011, the City Council somewhat arbitrarily selected several indicators for Food Metrics Reports. As the city considers its food policy goals for the next decade, it should identify new indicators that will add new insights and guide policy that can solve emerging problems. Especially welcome additions would be measures that capture emerging and dynamic dimensions of the food system, e.g., changing patterns of retail availability of food by neighborhood or changes in the ratio of fast food outlets to stores that sell fruits and vegetables by district. Other metrics to consider are the number of individuals or households eligible for public food programs but not enrolled, the number of retailers who accept SNAP or other benefits by community district, the density of fast food establishments, and the number and percent of various sub-populations experiencing food insecurity, e.g., immigrants, college students, and older people. Decisions on what metrics to include will be informed by cost and utility, but only by considering a range of options can policy makers make wise choices.

3. **Add other sources of data and create a unified publicly available data platform.**

   New York City and State present food data in several other formats including the Mayor’s Management Report, annual city Budget Reports, the New York City Department of Health’s annual Community Health Surveys and its restaurant inspection data, the Department of Education’s reports on use of school meals, and the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets food retail database.

   Aggregating these multiple sources into a single user-friendly database that policymakers, advocates, and community residents could use to assess municipal and local food environments would realize the potential of using Big Data to inform policy. By posting these documents and the data they analyze on platforms such as New York City Open Data, a site that makes city data more widely available, the Food Metrics Reports could facilitate further analysis and visualization by other public agencies, academics, community leaders, and advocates.

4. **Include more constituencies inside and outside city government in the metrics process.**

   Metrics that are created and analyzed by multiple constituencies have the potential to engage these populations in informing and shaping policy decisions. Conversely, restricting the process to a few public officials limits the opportunity for public discussion and collective ownership of the process.

   Improvements in food policy require an intersectoral perspective in which many municipal agencies work together enhance their
5. **Make equity a priority.**

For New York City’s food justice movement, promoting more equitable healthy urban food environments has been a high priority\(^{15}\). Despite more than a decade of attention to food policy, New York City’s progress in reducing the prevalence and inequities in its most serious food problems—food insecurity and hunger, diet-related diseases, the adverse environmental impact of our food system, and the low wages and poor working conditions of food workers, have been at best modest, as we show in Part 4 of this report.

By using the metrics to chart progress towards reducing these socioeconomic and racial/ethnic food inequities, New York City can realize its frequently articulated goal of becoming a more equitable city. As Mayor Bill de Blasio wrote in the 2017 OneNYC progress report, New York City “remain(s) committed to building a stronger and more just city. Over the next several years, we will build on our successes and expand the initiatives necessary to ensure our society and economy work so that every resident can thrive\(^{16}\)” Re-designing the Food Metrics Report to strengthen its contribution to that goal constitutes a worthy challenge for the next few years.

Take Care New York 2020, the New York City Health Department’s blueprint for giving everyone the chance to live a healthier life, is an example of a municipal report that tracks progress towards reducing inequalities in health\(^{16a} \). Its aim is to improve every community’s health, especially among groups with the worst health outcomes, so that the city becomes a more equitable place for everyone. By linking this process with Food Metrics Reports, city programs and policies that contribute to reducing food-related inequalities in health could be better coordinated and tracked.

Food environments are also shaped by non-food policies\(^{14} \). Increases in the minimum wage, for example, or decreases in residential rent puts more money in the pockets of low-income residents, enabling them to spend more on food. Changes in commercial rent influence the profitability of food stores. By expanding its intersectoral focus, the Food Metrics Reports could keep track of a wider range of influences on diet and food systems.

Academics and independent food researchers could also contribute to and benefit from more extensive involvement in the food metrics processes. They could assist the city to improve the quality and transparency of the data used in the report, identify other useful metrics and design small scale studies to inform the metrics process. They could also play a role in providing independent analyses of findings from the report, a task for which city agencies may lack the resources or credibility.

To date, the Food Metrics Reports do not appear to be used extensively by community residents and organizations. This may be due to the presentation of citywide rather than localized data, the lack of processes for community residents to give feedback or interpret the reports or the modest efforts at dissemination of reports. By holding public and community forums on the reports, inviting responses or reviews by community leaders and activists or creating a community advisory group, the authors of the reports could present a wider range of perspectives and inform future reports.

6. **Focus on outcomes as well as implementation.**

If the goal of food policy is to improve the well-being of the population and provide more equitable access to healthy food for all sectors of the population, then Food Metrics Reports should be judged by their contribution to that aim. A well-designed metrics process helps to achieve this goal by clearly defining the pathways by which implementing programs and policies leads to desired short-term impact and longer-term

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\(^{15}\) For New York City’s food justice movement, promoting more equitable healthy urban food environments has been a high priority.

\(^{16}\) As Mayor Bill de Blasio wrote in the 2017 OneNYC progress report, New York City “remain(s) committed to building a stronger and more just city. Over the next several years, we will build on our successes and expand the initiatives necessary to ensure our society and economy work so that every resident can thrive.”

\(^{16a}\) Take Care New York 2020, the New York City Health Department’s blueprint for giving everyone the chance to live a healthier life, is an example of a municipal report that tracks progress towards reducing inequalities in health.

\(^{14}\) Food environments are also shaped by non-food policies.

\(^{14a}\) Increases in the minimum wage, for example, or decreases in residential rent puts more money in the pockets of low-income residents, enabling them to spend more on food. Changes in commercial rent influence the profitability of food stores.

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This text is a continuation of the discussion on food policy in New York City since 2008, focusing on equity and the role of metrics in tracking progress towards more equitable urban food environments.
The third part of this report summarizes evidence on the implementation and impact of 40 major New York City or State food policies and programs implemented in New York City in the last decade. Our goal in this analysis is to extend what was learned from the analysis of the Food Metrics Reports in two ways. First, by looking beyond the few policies and programs described in the annual Food Metrics Reports, we seek to track progress on a larger sample of the 420 food policy recommendations described in Part 1, proposals that made their way through the political system to enactment and implementation. Second, by using other publicly available sources to ascertain the implementation and, where available, the impact of policies, we hope to broaden the understanding of what food policy changes in the last decade have accomplished. Although some of the policies described in this section were initiated before 2008, those on our list were substantially modified or expanded in the last decade, justifying their inclusion here.

The following criteria were used to select the 40 policies or programs listed in Table 3.1:

1. The policy was, in our judgment, proposed and enacted in part to contribute to the realization of one or more of the six food policy goals identified in Table 1 in the Introduction.

2. One or more academic or civil society reports in New York City listed this policy or program as a significant accomplishment in food policy of city or state government in the period, providing some external validation for our judgement.

3. Some publicly available evidence (e.g., academic, media or government reports) was available on implementation and or impact status of this policy.

A fuller description of these policies is provided in Table C in the Appendix to this report.

Policies that met all three criteria were included on the list. We recognize that this selection process might have left out some policies that could in the future be determined to be important and that...
some of those chosen may not yet have realized their potential to have an impact. In addition, others using different criteria may select other policies to highlight. Nevertheless, we believe that a review of a large group of policies that made their way through the political process to enactment and for which at least some evidence on implementation or impact is available can yield useful insights into the state of food policy in New York City and State today.

Our review of these 40 policies seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What evidence is available on the implementation and impact of major food policies and programs enacted in New York City in the last decade?
2. Using the evidence now available, to what extent have the 40 policies reviewed here contributed to achieving the six broad food policy goals listed in Part 1?

Table 3.1 Forty Significant Food Policies Implemented in New York City in the Last Decade*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Action</th>
<th>Year Enacted/Implemented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Improve nutritional well-being</strong> Policies that promote health and reduce diet-related diseases</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Launched Healthy Bodegas/Shop Healthy NYC! Program</td>
<td>Announced in 2006, and pilot tested in 2007, this initiative has been modified and expanded throughout the decade and was renamed as Shop Healthy NYC! in 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expanded number of salad bars in NYC public schools</td>
<td>New salad bars began to be opened in NYC schools in 2005, but were significantly expanded after the 2012 Mayor’s Task Force on Obesity, which recommended expanding to all NYC public schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banned artificial trans fat in NYC restaurants [amendment to NYC Health Code Article 81]</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Installed water jets in many NYC public schools</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established 1,000 permits for Green Carts [Local Law 9]</td>
<td>2008–Began providing support to equip vendors with EBT machines in 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required chain restaurants to post calorie information on menus/menu boards [amendment to NYC Health Code Article 81]</td>
<td>2008–Updated requirements in 2015 (with enforcement beginning in 2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piloted Garden to Café program in 20 New York City public schools</td>
<td>2008–Expanded program since its inception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Launched the Food Retail Expansion to Support Health (FRESH) program</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYC DOHMH ran several media campaigns to discourage consumption of unhealthy food</td>
<td>2009-2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established National Salt Reduction Initiative, a voluntary partnership initiated by NYC DOHMH</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Launched Grow to Learn NYC initiative</td>
<td>2011–Expanded to become a citywide school gardening initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Launched Fruit and Vegetable Prescription Pilot program at city hospitals</td>
<td>2013–Expanding to additional sites with 2016 funding from USDA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required sodium warning labels on chain restaurant menus</td>
<td>2015–Enforcement began in 2016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 2. Promote food security

Policies that reduce hunger and food insecurity and provide the quality and quantity of food needed to maintain health

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Launched Health Bucks Program</td>
<td>2005–2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Launched Food Stamp Paperless Office System</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NY State expanded SNAP eligibility and extended recertification</td>
<td>2008–2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implemented online application for NYC public school meal programs</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opened SNAP call centers</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NY State ended requirement for finger imaging for SNAP</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Created the New York City Food Assistance Collaborative</td>
<td>2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Began rollout to expand the Breakfast in the Classroom program in NYC public schools</td>
<td>2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implemented universal free school lunch in most New York City middle schools</td>
<td>2014–2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3. Create food systems that support economic development

Policies that promote community economic development through food and improved food production and distribution in region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extended the license agreement for city community gardens</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Food Procurement Guidelines for NYC Agencies (Local Law 50)</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Launched New York City Housing Authority’s first large-scale urban farm</td>
<td>2013–2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invested $150 million to revitalize the Hunts Point Terminal Produce Market</td>
<td>2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invested $15 million in the development of Greenmarket Regional Food Hub at Hunts Point</td>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4. Ensure sustainable food systems

Policies that reduce food waste and food-related pollution and carbon emissions and protect region’s farmland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supported preservation of farms in New York City watershed through the Watershed Agricultural Program</td>
<td>1992–2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Launched the Food Waste Challenge</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established a compost pilot program for curbside collection of organic waste (Local Law 77)</td>
<td>2013–2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Launched the NYC Mayor’s Zero Waste Challenge</td>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required heating oil sold or used by the City to contain a percentage of biodiesel (Local Law 119)</td>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5. Support food workers

Policies that provide food workers with decent wages and benefits, safe working conditions, and the right to organize

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased the minimum wage</td>
<td>2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protected employees in large grocery stores from immediately losing their jobs after an ownership transition (Local Law 11)</td>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protected fast food workers from unpredictable scheduling and payment (the Fair Work Week legislative package: Local Laws 98, 99, 100, 106, 107)</td>
<td>2016–2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 6. Strengthen food governance and food democracy

Policies that encourage civic engagement in shaping food policy and reduce the influence of special interests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Established New York State Food Policy Council</td>
<td>2007–2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established first Food Policy Coordinator position in Mayor’s Office in 2008</td>
<td>2008–Renamed as the Office of the Director of Food Policy in 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required annual Food Metrics Reports (Local Law 52)</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How well have these policies contributed to achieving the six broad food policy goals?

1. **Improve nutritional well-being.**

   The 15 policies in this area improved access to healthy food in low-income communities (Healthy Bodegas and Shop Healthy NYC!, FRESH, Green Carts); improved the quality and healthfulness of the city’s institutional food programs (salad bars and water jets in schools, New York City Food Standards, Garden to Café and Grow to Learn in Schools, Fruit and Vegetable Prescriptions in city hospitals); and discouraged consumption of unhealthy food (bans on trans fats, salt reduction, limits on sugary drinks in child care and other settings, calorie and salt labeling in chain restaurants, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) media campaigns). These 15 policies and programs reinforce each other and support several of the other food policy goals, including promoting food security and promoting community and economic development. Together they illustrate how city agencies, in this case with the Department of Health in the lead, in partnership with Departments of Education, Planning and others, supported and monitored by the Mayor’s Office of Food Policy, can implement City Council and Mayoral initiatives to improve urban food environments.

   As shown in Table C in the Appendix (link here), all 15 nutrition policies report some data on implementation, either through the Food Metrics Reports, Department of Health reports or scientific papers. Some data are available on the impact of the programs on food quality, diet, or health behaviors for 10 of the 15 policies. For the most part, these evaluation studies are modest in scale and methodological rigor.

   On the one hand, these limitations point to the challenge of transforming food environments and reversing the many diet-related health conditions that burden New York City residents and drive inequalities in health, and to the difficulty of evaluating impact on populations and attributing observed changes to the intervention.

   On the other hand, the accomplishments in food policy to date show that city and state governments can take action on food policy that have the potential to improve nutritional health. If these changes are brought to scale and sustained, and if the design problems encountered in early implementation are addressed, admittedly daunting ifs, a second policy cycle of implementation could have a meaningful impact on food-related health, well-being, and equity in New York City.

   In our view, however, these policies and programs have not been designed or implemented yet on a scale likely to lead to lasting and meaningful changes in nutritional health of New York City’s population. For example, only a third of Green Carts authorized are in operation, and the infrastructure problem of finding a place to store carts when they are not in use has not been solved. The number of stores opened by FRESH is far fewer than the number that have closed in targeted neighborhoods in the same period, and public spending on discouraging unhealthy food consumption is a tiny fraction of what the food industry spends in New York City to persuade consumers to use more of the ultra-processed products clearly associated with diet-related chronic diseases. In addition, the hypothesis that making healthy food more available and unhealthy food less available will itself lead to changes in diet requires further empirical investigation. A few recent studies cast doubt on the belief that opening new supermarkets in itself leads to improved diets.

   Importantly, many sectors of the population appear to support policies to improve nutritional well-being, an asset that could be tapped to make further advances. From a public health perspective, perhaps the most significant impact of the city policies implemented to improve nutritional well-being in the last decade may be that the municipal government has demonstrated that it can take on new roles in improving local food environments and making healthy food more accessible. Implementing these changes on a scale and with the intensity and duration needed to bring about changes in health remains a challenge for the next decade.

2. **Promote food security.**

   The nine policies in this area subsidized healthy food consumption (Health Bucks); facilitated enrollment in SNAP (changes in various city and state enrollment and eligibility practices); improved access to free breakfast and lunch for NYC school children; and strengthened the capacity of emergency food providers. Lead city agencies were New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA) and the Department of Education, again supported and monitored by the Mayor’s Office of Food Policy. Non-profit advocacy organizations such as Food Bank for New York City,
City Harvest, Hunger Free America (formerly the NYC Coalition Against Hunger), Community Food Advocates and its Lunch 4 Learning Campaign, and the Hunger Action Network of New York State played key roles in keeping city and state government focused on this issue and willing to innovate.

Several of the policies implemented to enhance SNAP enrollment were the result of changes in internal organizational practices at HRA (e.g., the 2007 Food Stamp Paperless Office System and the 2009 creation of SNAP call centers, which enabled completing some enrollment procedures by telephone rather than an office visit). These systems reduced waiting time at SNAP offices and facilitated enrollment for many families. They show that dedicated agency leaders can act to improve access to public benefits, an important lesson for city and state officials as the federal government considers cutting back support for these programs.

Another SNAP enrollment enhancement was the Nutritional Enhancement for Elders Through Data Sharing (NEEDS) Program, a joint effort by the Human Resources Administration and the Department for the Aging to increase senior citizen participation in SNAP among eligible individuals who are enrolled in the Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) Program. An internal evaluation of NEEDS, a program funded by the US Department of Agriculture from 2008 to 2011, found that it tripled enrollment of seniors in SNAP (comparing targeted seniors to a comparable group of seniors not targeted) and provided more SNAP benefits in dollars to SCRIE recipients than the total cost of the program. These two reforms show that some changes in the practices of public agencies can occur without legislative action and out of the spotlight of media and public attention.

Modifications of SNAP enrollment practices also illustrate the complex, sometimes hidden policy dance that can lead to changes. Several anti-hunger advocacy groups had long complained about long waits in SNAP offices; the subject was a frequent topic at the annual City Council hearing on food insecurity in New York City, and in 2008 the Public Advocate released a report on the problem. As noted, federally-funded demonstration projects also contributed useful evidence. While there is no documentation that changes in HRA practices can be attributed to these efforts, it seems likely that the combination of external pressure and the attention of the food policy coordinator played a role in these reforms.

In 2014, the Director of Food Policy convened an ongoing New York City Food Assistance Collaborative, another strategy that contributed to better coordination of the city’s various food security policies and programs. The Collaborative includes New York City’s largest emergency food suppliers to food pantries and community kitchens and focuses on increasing the capacity and coordination of emergency food providers and of the food and funds distributors that work with them. In 2016, according to the Food Metrics Reports, New York City allocated an additional $4.9 million in Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) funding to build capacity and provide additional food to emergency food providers in neighborhoods most underserved by food assistance programs.

This collaborative illustrates the potential for ongoing partnerships between municipal government and civil society organizations to act to reduce deep-seated food problems.

Eight of the nine food security policies have some implementation data; only two report data on health or consumption impact. A variety of data on receipt of public food benefits is available but few studies assess impact of administrative changes in outreach, enrollment or recertification on enrollment, participation or the prevalence of hunger or food security in various populations. Annual reports on the Meal Gap or the number of people served in emergency food programs released by anti-hunger advocacy and service organizations provide proxy measures of need.

3. Create food systems that support economic and community development.

Implementation of the five policies in this area has increased the number of community gardens and farms in New York City; increased the amount of New York State food served in city institutions, thus creating additional markets for New York State farmers; and improved the food distribution infrastructure at Hunts Point and in the South Bronx, changes that have the potential to contribute to healthier affordable food throughout the city. These changes have brought added public support for the development of alternative food models for New York City.

However, only a few of the 116 recommendations made in this area in the 20 policy reports reviewed in Part 1 have been acted on. Moreover, many of the problematic characteristics of New York City’s food system identified by policy experts have scarcely been addressed.
These include heavy reliance for our food supply on national food companies that still sell mostly processed food associated with chronic diseases, a food distribution system that still relies heavily on trucks, a mode of transportation that pollutes, blocks mobility and adds costs to the city’s food\textsuperscript{19, 20}, and a lack of support for small food manufacturers and food retail businesses that would allow them to overcome perceived obstacles such as unaffordable rents, and burdensome regulations\textsuperscript{21, 22}. Throughout the city, gentrification is threatening access to healthy affordable food, as well as affordable housing. No systematic policies seek to reduce the adverse impact of gentrification on food environments in New York City\textsuperscript{23}.

Moreover, the two goals of community development, usually meant for low income communities, and economic development, usually considered growth in the city’s overall Gross Domestic Product, may at times conflict. For example, our Institute’s study of food changes in East Harlem since 2001 showed how city development policies in that area changed food retail in ways that did not meet the needs of low-income residents for healthy affordable food. Instead, zoning and development policies encouraged the rapid increase in the number of fast food outlets in East Harlem, which increased four times more than the number of supermarkets, expanding access to unhealthy food while increasing the number of upscale supermarkets unaffordable to many residents\textsuperscript{24}.

New York City has provided some implementation data on four of the five policies; to our knowledge, none have been evaluated on their impact on our food economy or nutritional well-being.

4. Ensure sustainable food systems.

The four policies in this area contributed to increased preservation of upstate farmland and initiated several programs to reduce food waste. To preserve the quality of its source water, the New York City’s Department of Environmental Protection, created the Watershed Agricultural Council, which in partnership with other organizations, carries out a voluntary Watershed Agricultural Program that encourages New York State farmers to use agricultural best management practices. The goal of the Watershed Agricultural Program is to support and maintain well-managed family farms as beneficial land uses to advance water quality protection and rural economic viability. Since 1992, the program has worked with more than 440 farms in both the Catskill/Delaware and Croton Watersheds. Between 2012 and 2016, the Council added 358 farms, more than quadrupling the number of farms involved.

The three food waste programs play an important role in showing that city government can act to reduce waste and enlist some portion of businesses and residents in participating in these efforts. To date, these programs have operated at a relatively modest scale; significant expansion will be necessary to achieve meaningful reductions in the city’s food waste flow. The available data suggests that these programs are being implemented, but more years of data will be needed to track progress. Curbside composting reached one million people by early 2017 and is expected to reach an additional two million by the end of 2019, an impressive increase\textsuperscript{25}.

Several policies in other categories also contribute to this goal. The city’s food procurement guidelines have increased the proportion of local and regional food served in municipal institutional food programs and the expansion of farmers markets in the city has created new demand for the region’s farmers. Both actions reduce the number of food miles needed to bring food to New York City, thus potentially reducing pollution and carbon emissions that contribute to global warming.

The most significant obstacle to ensuring more sustainable food systems is that to date New York City, New York State, and the New York regional food shed lack a comprehensive food or agricultural plan\textsuperscript{26}. Developing such plans is an essential prerequisite for identifying and filling policy gaps for enhancing sustainability.

5. Support food workers.

Three policies on the Top Forty list support low wage food workers. A variety of city and state policies have increased minimum wages first for fast food and tipped workers and then for all workers. By the end of 2019, all city workers will have a minimum wage of $15. A second city law, approved in 2016, protects workers in large grocery stores from losing their jobs after an ownership transition. Finally, in 2017, a law passed by the City Council and signed by the Mayor went into effect, ensuring that fast food and other retail workers will have fair notification of their work hours and predictable schedules for paychecks\textsuperscript{27}. It is estimated that 65,000 workers in New York City will be protected by these laws. To our knowledge, no data are yet available on the implementation or
impact of these laws.

Another example of protection for food workers, not listed here as a policy, is illustrated by the law suits initiated by New York State Attorney General Eric Schneiderman against companies that fail to pay their workers proper wages and overtime. In a report released in September 2017, the attorney general announced that his office had recovered more than $2.7 million in back wages in the past year. The money was owed to more than 1,500 low-wage workers in several industries including fast-food.

In sum, the last three years have seen increased policy action to protect food workers, a marker of the successful efforts by worker organizations to put this issue on the city, state, and nation’s policy agenda and the growing local and national attention to the adverse consequences of income inequality and low wage labor. The ultimate impact of these new laws on the lives and working conditions of low wage food workers will depend on full implementation and vigorous enforcement.

6. **Strengthen food governance and democracy.**

Three policies were identified that contributed to strengthening food governance and food democracy. These included the establishment of the New York State Food Policy Council in 2007, later renamed the New York State Council on Hunger and Food Policy; the establishment of the Food Policy Coordinator’s position in the Office of the Mayor of New York City in 2008; and the 2011 City Council law requiring preparation of annual Food Metrics Reports. Of note, no major new city or state policies supporting improved food governance or food democracy have been enacted in the last six years.

Each of these three measures has made important contributions. The State Food Policy Council has served as a platform for convening state officials and others concerned about food policy and for engaging diverse constituencies in an ongoing dialogue of food policy. One independent assessment of the council, prepared in 2013 by the Hunger Action Network of New York State, while acknowledging the value of the forum, concluded that the State Food Policy Council had failed to fully implement the charges given to it by the Executive Order creating it. The report said the council failed to:

- Develop and recommend a food policy for New York State, which recognizes that it is in the best interests of the State to ensure the availability of an adequate supply of affordable, fresh, nutritious food to residents;
- Develop and recommend State policies to expand agricultural production, including locally grown and organically-grown food;
- Develop and recommend a strategic plan for implementation of New York State food policy, including benchmarks and criteria for measuring progress in achieving state food policy objectives; and,
- Offer comments on state regulations, legislation, and budget proposals in food policy, to ensure a coordinated and comprehensive inter-agency approach to food policy issues.

Whether this assessment is justified or has changed in recent years deserves further discussion among the State Food Policy Council, its constituencies, and critics. The assessment does show the value of independent assessments to monitor the performance of various food policy governance mechanisms. In another example of the value of such independent voices, a group of mostly Black and Latino food activists criticized the report from the Governor’s New York State Food Hub Taskforce, charging it insufficiently met the needs of farmers or eaters of color or of organizations seeking to improve food environments in Black and Latino communities. Some modifications in the plan followed.

While no independent or government reports are available on the functioning of New York City’s Food Policy Director, some observations seem warranted:

- The Office of the Food Policy Director has created a focal point for food policy in the Office of the Mayor and has elevated attention to food within that office. More city agencies now appear to be engaged in food policy than prior to 2007 and these officials are more likely to talk to each other and coordinate efforts.
- The position has served as an entry point for advocates, elected officials, and others to bring concerns and suggestions about food policy to the Office of the Mayor.
The first three parts of this report focused on the process of developing and implementing food policies and assessing their impact on short-term goals. In this part, we turn our attention to several longer-term outcomes. Using public data on selected health and social outcomes, we ask what have been the changes in these indicators over the last decade. Our analysis seeks to determine whether these indicators have been moving in the right direction, not to attribute observed changes to any specific policy. The goal is to provide guidance on whether we need to persist in what we are doing, do more of some things and less of others, or seek entirely different strategies.

We chose the following five outcomes because many policy documents and policy makers have identified improvements in these indicators as a target of policy, data are available over the period of interest, and a substantial body of evidence shows the pathways between improvements in these indicators and improvements in health. The outcomes selected are:

1. Fruit and vegetable consumption
2. Sugary beverage and soda consumption
3. Rates of obesity and overweight
4. Diagnoses of diabetes
5. Number of individuals reported food insecure using USDA definition

Because of our interest in food equity, where data are available comparing changes among different racial/ethnic or income groups, we present this evidence.

**Fruit and vegetable consumption**

Most nutrition researchers agree that higher levels of fruit and vegetable consumption are associated with lower risks of obesity, diabetes, and other diet-related health conditions\(^43\). The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends consumption of five or more daily portions of fruits and vegetables.
According to the MyPlate guidelines, fruits and vegetables should make up half of one’s plate at any given meal—about 30 percent vegetables and 20 percent fruit. Several city and state policies implemented in the last decade sought to increase access to fruits and vegetables to increase consumption. These include the New York City Food Standards, Green Carts, FRESH, changes in SchoolFood, expansions of farmers markets and others.

The New York City Community Health Survey (CHS) is a telephone survey conducted annually by DOHMH, Division of Epidemiology, and Bureau of Epidemiology Services. CHS provides robust data on the health of New Yorkers, including neighborhood, borough, and citywide estimates on a broad range of chronic diseases and behavioral risk factors. The CHS is a cross-sectional telephone survey with an annual sample of approximately 8,500 randomly selected adults aged 18 and older from all five boroughs of New York City (Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, Bronx, and Staten Island).

Figure 4.1 shows that between 2008 and 2015, the number of New York City adults eating one to four portions of fruits and vegetables a day has remained stable at about 80 percent of the population. The proportion eating five or more serving a day, the CDC recommendation for health, and the portion eating no servings a day have also stayed stable at about 10 percent each.

To assess changes in fruit and vegetable consumption by race/ethnicity, we compared rates in 2008 with those in 2015 (see Tables D and E in Appendix). These show that in 2008 and in 2015, Blacks and Hispanics were about twice as likely to report consuming no daily fruits and vegetables as whites. The disparity with whites increased somewhat for Blacks and decreased modestly for Hispanics during the interval. The racial/ethnic differences for daily consumption of five or more portions of fruits and vegetable also persisted with Blacks and Hispanic adults less than half as likely to achieve this target as whites.
In sum, the evidence for fruit and vegetable consumption among adults and high school students in New York City does not show significant improvements and only a small fraction meets the recommended fruit and vegetable consumption. Racial/ethnic inequalities in fruit and vegetable consumption have improved somewhat for Black youth, but not for Latino youth. Among adults, wide gaps persist.

**Sugary beverage and soda consumption**

Sugary beverages are both a marker of less healthy diets and a product directly associated with various adverse health outcomes including obesity, diabetes, and other diet related health conditions. A variety of successful and failed New York City and State policy initiatives have sought to increase the price, reduce access and ultimately reduce consumption of sugary beverages. These include the failed state soda tax, the city effort to limit portion size of sugary beverages, the successfully implemented New York City Food Standards, changes in vending policies in city schools, and DOHMH educational campaigns.

Data from the New York City Community Health Survey, shown in Figure 4.3, show that for adults, sugary drink consumption declined...
between 2007 and 2013, but stagnated in 2014 and 2015 with about a quarter of the adult population drinking one or more sugary drinks a day.

From 2007 to 2015, sugary beverage consumption declined for each racial/ethnic group (White, Black, Latino, and Asian/Pacific Islander). Consumption was higher among Black and Latino adults than white and Asian adults every year from 2007 to 2015. The gap in daily consumption between whites and Asians, on the one hand, and Blacks and Latinos on the other shrank somewhat over the nine years. (See Table H in the Appendix). Sugary beverage consumption in the Health Action Center neighborhoods fell into the highest sugary beverage consumption group.

While sugary drink consumption among adolescents declined between 2013 and 2017, a recent report from the New York City Health Department found that since 2013, sugary drink consumption among NYC public high school students overall remained stable for the next three years (42 percent in 2013 and 40 percent in 2015 consumed one or more per day). However, in both 2013 and 2015, Black and Latino youth had higher rates of sugary drink consumption than white youth (in 2015, 47 percent of Black and 42 percent of Latino vs. 29 percent of white youth consumed one or more per day). Sugary drink consumption among White youth declined between 2013 and 2015 (38 percent vs. 29 percent), but not among Black, Latino, or Asian youth, leaving sharp inequalities in place.

Among New York City children aged six to 12, daily sugary beverage consumption fell for all four racial/ethnic groups between 2009 and 2015, as shown in Figure 4.4. However, the largest decline was for white children at 39 percent decline, with drops of 13 percent for Blacks, 20 percent for Latinos, and 27 percent for Asian/Pacific Islanders. In 2015, racial/ethnic gaps in sugary beverage consumption were also high for children aged zero to five, with Black and Latino children consuming a portion or more of sugary beverages a day almost four times higher than for white children. These data suggest that despite the declines, racial/ethnic disparities in sugary beverage consumption increased during this period.
**Rates of obesity and overweight**

Obesity and overweight are measured by an indicator known as the Body-Mass Index (BMI), a widely-used metric based on a person’s weight in kilograms divided by their height in meters squared. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) now defines normal weight, overweight, and obesity according to BMI rather than the traditional height/weight charts. Overweight is defined as a BMI of 27.3 or more for women and 27.8 or more for men, obesity is defined as having a BMI of 30 or more. For children, obesity is defined as having a BMI over the 95th percentile as proposed by the US Centers for Disease Control Growth Charts and overweight is defined as having a BMI greater than or equal to the 85th percentile.

Several city and state policies and programs, including the portfolio of projects recommended in 2012 by the Mayor’s Task Force on Obesity, had as a primary goal the reduction of childhood, youth, and adult obesity.

Although researchers point out the limitations of BMI as a sole indicator of desired weights, wide body of evidence shows that those with higher BMIs are at greater risk of diabetes, high blood pressure, and other diet-related diseases.

As shown in Table 4.5, the rate of New York City adults who were overweight, but not obese stayed essentially flat since 2002, and the rate of adult obesity increased slightly. For whites, Asians and African Americans, rates of obesity declined slightly between 2008 and 2015 (see Tables I and J in Appendix); for Latinos the rate increased slightly. In sum, the unequal distribution of overweight and obesity persisted over the eight years, with about two thirds of Black and Latino adults, half of white adults and about a third of Asian/Pacific Islander adults reporting they were obese or overweight in both 2008 and 2015. No single metric better portrays the burden of diet-related disease looming in New York City’s future nor the racial/ethnic inequalities in health that can be expected to persist in the coming decades.

For children and youth obesity and overweight rates, two sources of data are available. The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) shows (See Figure 4.6) that between 2007 and 2015 both overweight and obesity stayed essentially flat for young people enrolled in New York City’s public schools. With about 10 percent of young people obese and 15 percent overweight, but not obese, about a quarter of this population reported BMIs above the level most associated with health. Comparing across race and ethnicity, rates of obesity increased between 2007 and 2015 for all four racial/ethnic groups of young people. Rates of overweight increased in this period for Blacks, Latinos, and Asians but decreased for whites (See Tables K and L in Appendix).

A 2009 report from New York City DOHMH shows that in 2007-2008, 18 percent of children in kindergarten to eighth grade were overweight and 21 percent obese. Latino children had higher rates of obesity and overweight than whites, Blacks, or Asian/Pacific Islander children.
Diagnoses of diabetes

A diagnosis of diabetes predicts shorter life span, a higher burden of illness, and more health care utilization. In New York City, diabetes is a leading cause of illness, death, and a major cause of racial/ethnic and income inequalities in health. Changes in diet can prevent diabetes, ameliorate symptoms, and prevent hospitalizations. For these reasons, New York City and State policy makers have made the prevention and improved management of diabetes a key goal of food policy as well as health care policy.

Data from the New York City Community Health Survey shows that between 2007 and 2015, the percentage of adult New Yorkers who had ever been told by a health provider that they have diabetes increased from 9.1 percent to 11.6 percent, an increase of 27 percent as shown in Table 4.7. In addition, a 2011 study by the New York City DOHMH showed that 26 percent of New York City adults with diabetes were unaware they had it, suggesting that true rates are even higher. Rates increased for all four racial/ethnic groups during this interval, by 38 percent for Latinos, 34 percent for Blacks, 16 percent for Asian/Pacific Islanders and eight percent for whites. (See Tables M and N in Appendix.) Once again, the data show that racial/ethnic gaps in diagnoses of diabetes appear to have widened in the last decade.

Number of individuals reported food insecure using USDA definition

The final metric we will examine are the number of New York City residents who meet the USDA definition of food insecurity. Each year, the USDA surveys a sample of US residents and reports on rates of food insecurity by county, state, and nation; some of the years analysts have used these reports to calculate the rates for New York City. Table 4.8 shows that the number of food insecure residents of New York City decreased by about 89,200 between 2009 and 2015 while the percentage fell by one percent, a drop of six percent. Most analysts attribute the decline to the improvements in the economy after recovery from the 2008 recession. Between 2013 and 2015 alone, the rate of food insecurity among New York City residents fell about eight percent from 2013, a decline attributed locally and nationally to improvements in the region’s economy since the 2008 recession.
Conclusions from the review of Five Outcomes

In sum, our review of changes in five key health and social outcomes over the last decade or so showed few or at best small increases in daily fruit and vegetable consumption, some reductions in sugary beverage consumption, persistently high rates of obesity and overweight with stable or widening inequitable distribution by race and ethnicity, modest increases in the proportion of New Yorkers ever diagnosed with diabetes, and modest recent declines in the number and percentages of New Yorkers experiencing food insecurity.

Several possible hypotheses may explain these mostly disappointing results. First, it is possible that absent of the policies or programs described in this report, these indicators would have gotten much worse.

Second, it may be that these policies and programs have not yet realized their full potential. In this scenario, if policy makers and city and state government persist, in the next decade the targeted outcomes will begin to change for the better.

Third, it is possible that the policies and programs described in this report have not been implemented with the intensity, duration, or population impact needed to bring about changes in complex and deeply rooted outcomes. This hypothesis suggests the need for mid-course corrections that strengthen and expand successful approaches and drop unsuccessful ones.

Fourth, perhaps the wrong policies and programs have been implemented. By choosing incremental and mostly modest programs perhaps New York has missed an opportunity to create the innovative and transformational changes needed to address the fundamental causes of New York City’s food-related problems. This explanation would require policy makers and advocates to go back to the drawing board to design new approaches to food policy.

Finally, it may be that the most important determinants of diet-related diseases, food insecurity, poor working conditions for low wage workers, and unsustainable food and farm practices do not operate primarily at the municipal or state level. Thus, what may be needed to see the desired changes in outcomes are national or global reforms of our food system.

While these explanations are not mutually exclusive, they do suggest different directions for policy and practice. More empirical research is urgently needed to better understand which combination of these explanations best clarifies next steps. In the next section, we propose a few studies that could help to clarify options for policy-relevant research. New York City cannot afford to wait for the evidence these studies produce. Rather, policy makers, public officials, researchers and advocates will need to use the ample evidence now available to act. The unacceptable outcome would be that five to ten years from now, we will still be lamenting the limited progress on key indicators of healthy, equitable, and sustainable food systems.
In the last decade, New York City became a national and international leader in using the capacity, power, resources, and authority of local government to improve food environments. As the findings from our review of city and state policies recommended, monitored, and implemented have shown, New York City and State officials have produced a rich portfolio of policy recommendations. The city has created a system for monitoring implementation of key policies and producing public reports that allow interested observers to monitor progress. Our review of programs and policies implemented (The Top 40) shows that for each of the six broad goals of food policy (See Table 1), several policies and programs have been implemented and at least some have reported measurable progress. Perhaps the city’s most impressive accomplishments are that food policy is now on the agenda of city and state officials, constituencies inside and outside the government are mobilized to monitor a variety of food policies and to advocate for change as needed, and many more New Yorkers are convinced that getting food policy right is an essential task for assuring the future of the city’s health, economy, environment, and commitment to fairness.

In the last decade, however, despite the flurry of food policy activity, our review of health and social outcomes shows New York City has not yet seen substantial progress on key food indicators that threaten the city’s future. While some of the causes of this lack of progress require further study, and may be beyond the scope of municipal and state government, our review suggests some places where city and state government can take action. Despite unprecedented efforts to address the city’s food problems, most of the hundreds of city, state, civil society, and commercial food initiatives now in progress are poorly or not at all coordinated, leading to duplication of effort, unaddressed problems and neglected populations, continual reinvention of wheels and sometimes chaotic implementation. Despite the substantial efforts to document and evaluate the many food initiatives now underway, for the most part we have little information on what is working and what is not working and what is the cumulative impact of our multiple efforts. Despite the city’s and state’s new food policy governance bodies, most New Yorkers still have few opportunities to participate in shaping their local food environments.

How do we reconcile these disparate tales of two cities— one making progress on improving food policy and environments, the other barely able to budge the needle on the most important health and social justice outcomes? How do we find the right path between celebrating the impressive food policy accomplishments of the last decade while also vowing that a decade from now New York City will be able to document more substantial progress on achieving its food policy goals?

Our recommendations suggest some possible directions for negotiating this dilemma.

Recommendations

Create a New York City Food Plan

Lewis Carroll once said, “If you don’t know where you are going, any road will get you there.” The problem in New York City is not lack of food policy goals – witness the 420 recommendations in the 20 reports we reviewed from the last decade. Rather, there are too many goals and no clear policy agenda or strategic plan. Without such a plan, it is difficult to monitor progress or identify problems or opportunities. In the coming years, New York City should develop a formal multi-year food plan with specific goals and defined strategies for achieving these goals. Several cities have developed such plans including Los Angeles, Chicago, London, Toronto and others, offering starting points for New York City.

In addition, New York City has a tradition of participatory planning, including 197A plans that enable residents, community boards, the Mayor and City Planning, and others to sponsor plans for the development, growth, and improvement of the city, its boroughs and communities. The city charter also promotes public participation in planning through the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure, or ULURP in which community boards get an advisory vote on proposed site-specific land use changes. Social movements have also shown their ability to influence planning, for example in the case of community gardens and in the last decade bringing a food justice and health equity perspective to food policy in New York City. The lessons from these planning experience in New York and other cities can inform the process and structure of a New York City food plan.
Deciding both the process and the content of such a plan will require thoughtful and intense discussions among all participants. In our view, while some organization needs to be accountable for the development and monitoring of the plan, no single institution has the mandate, resources, credibility, or capacity to develop a plan on its own. Creating a structure for planning will be an essential first step. Several recent reports have suggested critical elements and processes for urban food planning, providing New York City with the opportunity to learn from the food planning experiences of other cities. We propose that in the coming year, several organizations doing food work in New York City should convene a working group to propose a process for creating a New York City food plan. To avoid the common New York City trap of getting caught in an endless process discussion, the planning group should set a specific timeline for its recommendations. Moreover, all participants should agree at the start that the goal is the development of a fair, efficient, and practical plan that is good enough to move forward rather than a perfect process that will produce a perfect plan.

While some cities have found food policy councils helpful, others have not, getting mired in process issues. Whether an existing city plan, such as OneNYC, Mayor de Blasio’s comprehensive approach to promoting equity for all New Yorkers, could constitute a home for a food plan also warrants discussion.

In our view, the annual New York City Food Metrics Reports have established a foundation for monitoring food policy across city agencies. But as we noted, they have several shortcomings. To improve the food metrics process, in Part 2 we suggested and provided a rationale for the following steps:

1. Include denominators as well as numerators for relevant metrics.
2. Select additional indicators.
3. Add other sources of data and create a unified publicly available data platform.

### Table 5.1 Outcomes and Metrics for Key Food Policy Goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Goal</th>
<th>Desired Long-Term Outcomes</th>
<th>Possible Metrics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improve nutritional well-being</td>
<td>Reduced prevalence and geographic and social inequalities in diet-related diseases, increased longevity, decreased preventable hospitalizations, and ER visits</td>
<td>• Rates of diet related diseases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Hospital admission rates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Number of ER visits</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promote food security</td>
<td>Reduced hunger and food insecurity, lower prevalence of conditions due to under-nutrition, increased productivity and academic achievement, reduced poverty and dependence</td>
<td>• Number and % of food insecure households overall and by population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Poverty rates</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• % population earning below &quot;living wage&quot;</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• High school graduation rates</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Unemployment rates</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Food prices</td>
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We propose that by the end of 2018, collaborating with those developing the New York City Food Plan, a working group could propose Food Policy Metrics 2.0 – a set of outcomes and metrics, including many already collected by other city and state agencies be added to the food policy monitoring process. While recommendation one and two overlap, the skills required for developing a food plan are somewhat different than those need to identify useful, affordable and meaningful metrics; hence the recommendation for two distinct work groups that communicate closely.

Table 5.1 suggests possible long-term outcomes for the six broad food policy goals that New York City is pursuing and identifies possible metrics for assessing progress towards these goals. We propose that by the end of 2018, collaborating with those developing the New York City Food Plan, a working group could propose Food Policy Metrics 2.0 – a set of outcomes and metrics, including many already collected by other city and state agencies be added to the food policy monitoring process. While recommendation one and two overlap, the skills required for developing a food plan are somewhat different than those need to identify useful, affordable and meaningful metrics; hence the recommendation for two distinct work groups that communicate closely.
translate their commitment into specific policies and plans that reduce inequitable access to food and the inequitable distribution of the adverse outcomes such as diabetes, food insecurity, and low wages for food workers.

This will require the expansion and improvement of both food policies – e.g., further improvements in institutional food, a nutritional safety net for vulnerable populations, safeguarding food benefit programs such as SNAP and WIC against the funding cuts and block granting proposed by President Trump and Congress – and non-food policies such as more affordable housing, higher wages and more benefits for low-income workers, and improved educational opportunities from pre-school to college.

The most fundamental strategy for improving the health and social outcomes associated with food in New York City is to reduce the prevalence and adverse consequences of poverty and inequality. Calling attention to the intimate links between poverty and diet is a first step towards developing more effective long-term policies. Given the commitment of the Mayor and City Council to reducing inequality, making the case for municipal action to reduce food inequity should not be difficult.

By making reductions in the current socioeconomic and racial/ethnic inequitable distribution of the five outcomes reviewed in Part 4 (fruit and vegetable and soda consumption, obesity, diabetes and food insecurity) a political priority, New York City policy makers can contribute to reducing the food dimensions of the problem that most threatens New York City’s future – continuing high rates of poverty and widening gaps in income inequality.

**Create food systems that support economic development**

- Increased employment, increased number of jobs and wages for food workers that pay decent wages and offer benefits, increased self-sufficiency, reduced dependence at household and neighborhood levels

**Ensure sustainable food systems**

- Reduced carbon emissions and fewer adverse effects of climate change, less food waste, fewer unnecessary food miles, reduced pollution of water, soil, and air

**Protect food workers**

- Improved pay and working conditions for food workers, reduced income inequality, and improved food safety

**Promote food democracy**

- More democratic and civic participation, less inequality, more residents have a voice in shaping local food environments

**Focus New York City food policies and programs more explicitly on reducing current inequities in food-related outcomes.**

Our inability to reduce the wide socioeconomic and racial/ethnic inequalities in food-related outcomes in New York City (See Part 4) is one of the most disturbing findings from this assessment of food policies over the last decade. In Mayor de Blasio’s 2013 campaign and in his 2015 OneNYC Plan, he articulated a vision and made specific commitments to reducing inequality in New York City. On some indicators, such as access to preschool, significant progress has been made. This second term provides the Mayor, the City Council, advocates, and civil society organizations with an opportunity to

**Strengthen New York City’s public sector in food**

In our view, the greatest food policy accomplishment of Mayors Michael Bloomberg and Bill de Blasio, the City Council, state government and New York City’s emerging food justice movement is the strengthening of New York’s public sector in food. The New York City Food Standards, Universal Free School Lunch, Green Carts, FRESH, calorie labeling, the trans fat ban, facilitating enrollment in SNAP and WIC, higher minimum wages for fast food workers – all are examples of New York’s municipal and state governments using their power to improve our food system.
Despite these accomplishments, conventional wisdom still holds that our food system operates almost wholly in the market sector and that there is no alternative to having giant food companies make most decisions about who gets to eat what. In fact, the United States—and especially New York City—have a robust public sector in food. Including SNAP and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), multi-billion-dollar programs in New York City alone; school food, hospital food, jail food, child care food, and other public institutional food programs. This also extends to local, state, and national subsidies and tax breaks for food growers and sellers; and the food safety system, which includes restaurant and store inspections.

While no one has quantified the full scope of public spending on food in New York City, tax payer dollars, and government workers touch a significant proportion of the food we consume. The problem is that public food programs are distributed through several levels and branches of government and few policy makers have focused on how to use the cumulative power of the public food system to achieve public goals such as reducing hunger, preventing diabetes, or protecting low wage food workers.

By making a systematic effort to map, analyze, and improve the public sector in food, New York City can identify specific ways that municipal and state government, in partnership with other constituencies, can use the power of this sector to realize the goals articulated in the proposed New York City Food Plan. Some specific ways that city and state government could use their authority to improve the public sector in food include:

- Strengthen the New York City Food Standards and apply them to more public institutions such as all hospitals, City University of New York, and more publicly funded non-profits.
- Strengthen the city’s food procurement rules to better leverage market power for improved nutrition, support regional farmers more substantially, and protect food workers who produce for the public sector.
- Create city and state funded public food assistance programs that serve all immigrants, regardless of documentation status. In New York City, documentation status should not force people to go hungry.

- End promotion of unhealthy foods such as soda, fast food and high sugar, fat and salt snacks in all city-owned or supported facilities. The ubiquity of the unhealthy food that drives epidemics of diet-related diseases encourages consumption and sends a message that this food is acceptable. By using its existing authority to set rules about what can be sold or marketed in public spaces, New York City can contribute to reducing unhealthy food consumption. Lessons from the successes of tobacco control movement may be relevant.

Food policy advocates can craft these and other suggestions into a systematic plan to strengthen New York City’s public sector in food, using its powers to accelerate progress towards goals, coordinate multiple initiatives, achieve synergies in now mostly separate programs, and build popular support for policies that make healthy food choices easy choices.

By uniting New Yorkers in support of a strong public sector in food, policy makers and advocates also create a policy and political rationale to challenge another significant threat to the city’s food future, the ideological belief that markets know best. In fact, New York City’s most serious threats to health result from the market failures of a national food system and economy that cannot provide enough healthy affordable food to feed all Americans. Furthermore, the market depends on profits from aggressive marketing of products associated with premature death and preventable illnesses. A stronger public sector in food is an antidote to these market failures. New York City can lead the nation in testing new approaches to strengthening its public sector in food.

Create new democracy and governance processes

In the last decade, city and state government have created new ways to coordinate and plan food policy, including the establishment of the Food Policy Coordinator in the Mayor’s Office in 2007 and the creation of the New York State Food Policy Council in 2007, later reconstituted as the New York State Council on Hunger and Food Policy. In addition, food policy advocates and community residents in New York City have used established and new mechanisms to participate in shaping policy. These include public forums and reports, city council and community board hearings, participatory budgeting, lobbying and advocacy, demonstrations, and lawsuits.
Compared to a decade ago, it seems clear that today more elected officials, more advocates, and more New York residents participate in shaping food policy, an important indicator of progress. Among the political outcomes of this higher level of participation, we believe, are the implementation of public policies and programs like the Green Carts, Universal Free Lunch in city schools, removal of some barriers to SNAP enrollment, higher minimum wages, Health Bucks, and the expansion and use of EBTs in farmers markets.

The emergence of an informal and still loosely structured New York City food policy advocacy coalition that includes some elected officials, community leaders, and advocacy organizations increase the chances that food policy will continue to make progress in the coming decade. Even though the coalition is sometimes fragmented and has not yet developed a coherent policy agenda, its very existence is a big step forward for food policy in New York City.

Despite these accomplishments, food policy governance faces some daunting challenges. First, many of the advances of the last decade rely on executive orders (e.g., Food Standards, Office of Food Policy Coordinator, State Food Policy Council) rather than legislation or approved budgetary allocations. This makes these reforms vulnerable to changes in who holds office. Second, as President Trump and Congress roll back many of the advances in federal food policies, new or strengthened national coalitions to defend these programs will be needed. New York City will need to revitalize and bolster coalitions such as New York City Alliance for Child Nutrition Act Reauthorization (NYC4CNR) and the Food and Farm Policy Working Group that brought New York City voices into these national debates in the past. Both the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act, last renewed in 2010 and extended yearly since 2016, and the Farm Bill scheduled for re-authorization in 2018 will demand policy makers and advocates attention in the coming years.

A third problem, as yet no organization or coalition speaks authoritatively and credibly for the vast constituencies most adversely affected by New York City’s food system. These include food insecure, hungry or homeless New Yorkers, individuals and families affected by diabetes and other diet-related diseases, low wage food workers who do not earn enough to feed their own families, immigrants who are losing access to even the meager food benefits they were eligible for, and residents of gentrifying neighborhoods where healthy affordable food is becoming harder to find.

Although these groups may constitute the majority of New Yorkers, they still lack any organized voice in food policy governance. The many professional groups and coalitions doing work in the various sectors of food policy (e.g., food insecurity, obesity, urban agriculture, school food, etc.) act vigorously to advocate for better policies, but for the most part cannot speak for these other constituencies.

Fourth, special interests such as the soda and sugary beverage industry, operators of big supermarkets, real estate developers, and the ultra-wealthy continue to oppose food, housing and tax policies that could contribute to more effective and just food policies. In efforts to tax soda, limit soda portion size, or create more affordable housing, these interests have successfully blocked city and state policy initiatives. The failure of city and state governments to act forcefully to reduce conflicts of interest, reform campaign financing, or limit the influence of lobbyists leaves many residents mistrustful or cynical, discouraging their participation in campaigns to improve food or other policies.

Many of the mechanisms for citizen participation that do exist, from participatory budgeting, testifying at community boards or City Council hearings, writing letters or meeting with legislators often appear to be more symbolic than real participation. At best, these processes influence policy only at the margins, with the meaningful decisions made behind closed doors. Some observers have called these processes Kabuki participation, after the Japanese theater form where conflicts between adversaries are staged with little attempt to mediate, find common ground, or reach resolution.

The stenosis of American democracy in the recent past has led some observers to despair of meaningful resident participation in shaping food or other policies. Our view, however, is that a close reading of the last decade of food activism in New York City suggests multiple avenues for engaging young people, parents, people with diet-related illnesses, food workers, and others in the process of changing food policy and politics.

Fixing these problems presents New Yorkers and those concerned with food justice a daunting to do list for the next decade. Some short-term suggestions that could begin in the next year are:

- Make the Food Policy Coordinator a charter-established position and fund the office adequately to achieve its mandates.
• Explore the creation of a 197(a) food plan that would use this established mechanism to convene relevant constituencies to develop a New York City food plan that would then go through the 197(a) development and approval process. As noted, another option would be to create a coherent comprehensive food plan within OneNYC.

• Explore the creation of an inside or outside government food policy council and youth food policy council, incorporating experiences from other cities that have used this approach.

• Develop stronger horizontal and vertical linkages among city, state, regional, and national food coalitions.

• Create forums and platforms where food policy makers, activists, and social movements working on immigrant rights, equitable education, workers’ rights, environmental justice, Black and Latino justice, women’s health and rights, and LGBTQ rights can meet, talk, argue, and find common ground to advance their shared agendas in New York City and beyond.

Research and Evaluation

To define meaningful goals and strategies for improving food policy over the next decade, public officials, advocates, and community leaders will need more and better evidence to make informed decisions. The references to this report document that there are dozens of studies and reports documenting problems and analyzing and evaluating food policies and programs in New York City. This substantial body of evidence is an essential foundation for charting goals and strategies of the next period. But as we have observed throughout the report, New York City still lacks answers to some of the most basic questions about its food policies and programs:

• What is the cumulative impact of policies to, for example, increase access to fruits and vegetables or reduce soda consumption? What components of these policy portfolios contribute most and least to observed changes? What has been the differential impact of these policy portfolios on different populations groups? Answers to these questions would help to adjust policy to achieve maximum impact and focus attention on those approaches most effective in reducing gaps in key health and social outcomes.

• How do multiple community level and city level food policy initiatives interact with each other? What strategies could increase their cumulative impact?

• How do New York City eaters, especially low-income eaters, make decisions about what food and beverages to buy, cook, and eat? How do neighborhood and municipal food systems and cultural and social factors influence these choices? Without a deeper understanding of consumer behavior and more systematic evidence on what consumers want, it will be difficult to craft strategies that increase healthy food choices. Currently, most consumer research is sponsored by the food industry and New Yorkers get most of their food information from the food industry, via advertising and other forms of marketing. The food industry has found that unhealthy food generally brings higher profits than healthy food, leading them to emphasize promotion of unhealthy products. While New York City cannot by itself reduce this asymmetrical access to research and intervention, it can harness its assets to provide evidence to inform healthier policies.

To remedy these gaps in the research and evaluation studies needed to guide the next decade of food policy, academic institutions, philanthropic organizations, policy makers, and others in New York City can:

• Convene the many academic institutions and researchers studying food policy in New York City to develop a food policy research and evaluation agenda for New York City. By creating a voluntary, consensus building approach to food policy research, academics and city and state officials can encourage more coordinated systematic and cohesive research and evaluation of food policy.

• Establish a repository of food policy reports, evaluation studies, and instruments to encourage more collaborative research and evaluation efforts and to create a more systematic body of evidence.

• Convene foundations and public funders that support food policy work in New York City to develop standards and common measures for evaluation studies of the food interventions they support to create a more coherent and systematic body of evidence.
In making these suggestions we are aware of our limitations. We are academics and advocates, not policy makers or elected officials. We have the luxury and privilege of critical analysis without the responsibility of implementation. In acknowledgment of that role, our goal is modest: to spark conversations, encourage dialogue so that together all those who depend on New York City’s food system can find the ways to make sure that in the next decade our city’s food policies can become fairer, more effective, more sustainable and better able to contribute to our city’s future. We look forward to working with others to find these paths.

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See for example:


See for example:


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