



Exploring the Six Dimensions of Food Security in New Jersey

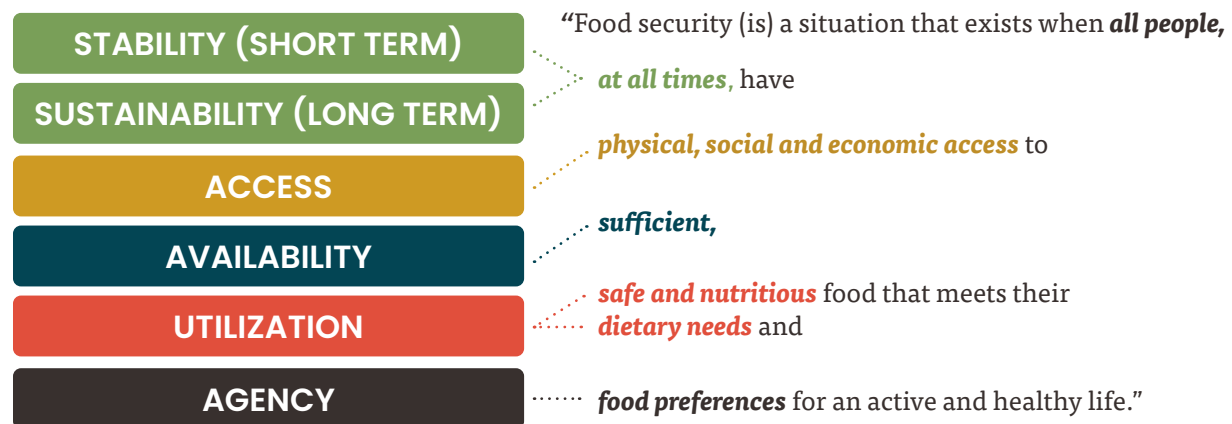
*Executive Summary and
Recommendations for Action*





The New Jersey Office of the Food Security Advocate (OFSA) partnered with the Center for Nutrition & Health Impact (CNHI) in 2024–2025 to develop and implement a set of measures framed around the six dimensions of food security.

Six Dimensions of Food Security



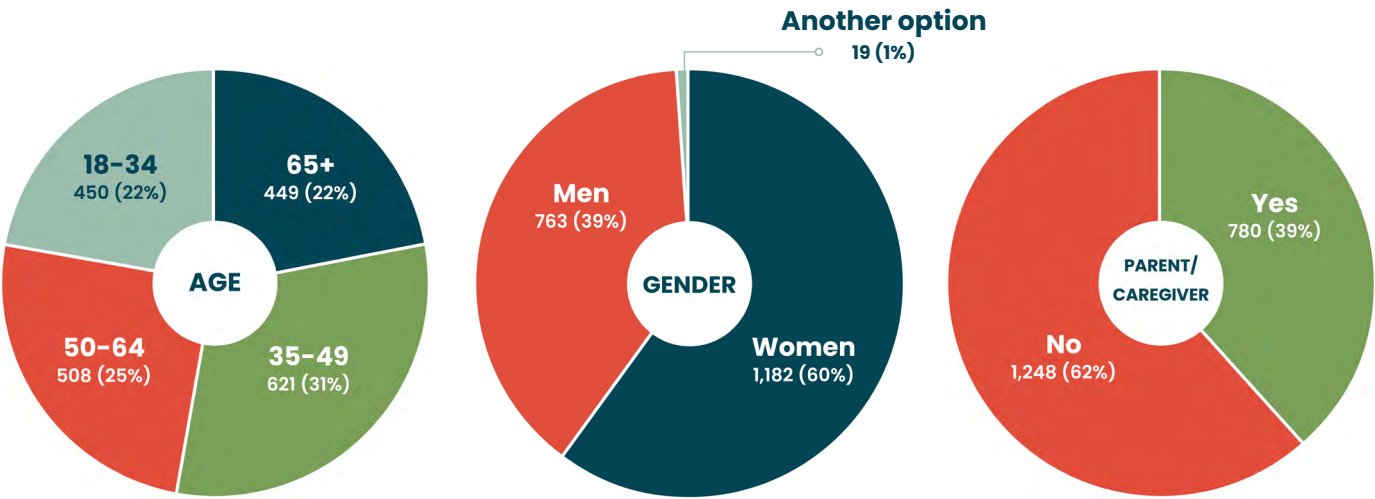
There were three main phases of survey data collection for this project:

- 1** **Statewide sample** of New Jersey community members (n=974) via a **Qualtrics** survey panel.
- 2** **Oversampling** within **nine areas** across New Jersey that were **identified as experiencing higher rates of food insecurity** (n=1,054) to ensure representation among the most impacted New Jerseyans in the sample.
- 3** In-depth **survey of food system experts** (n=61) that focused on sustainability topics.

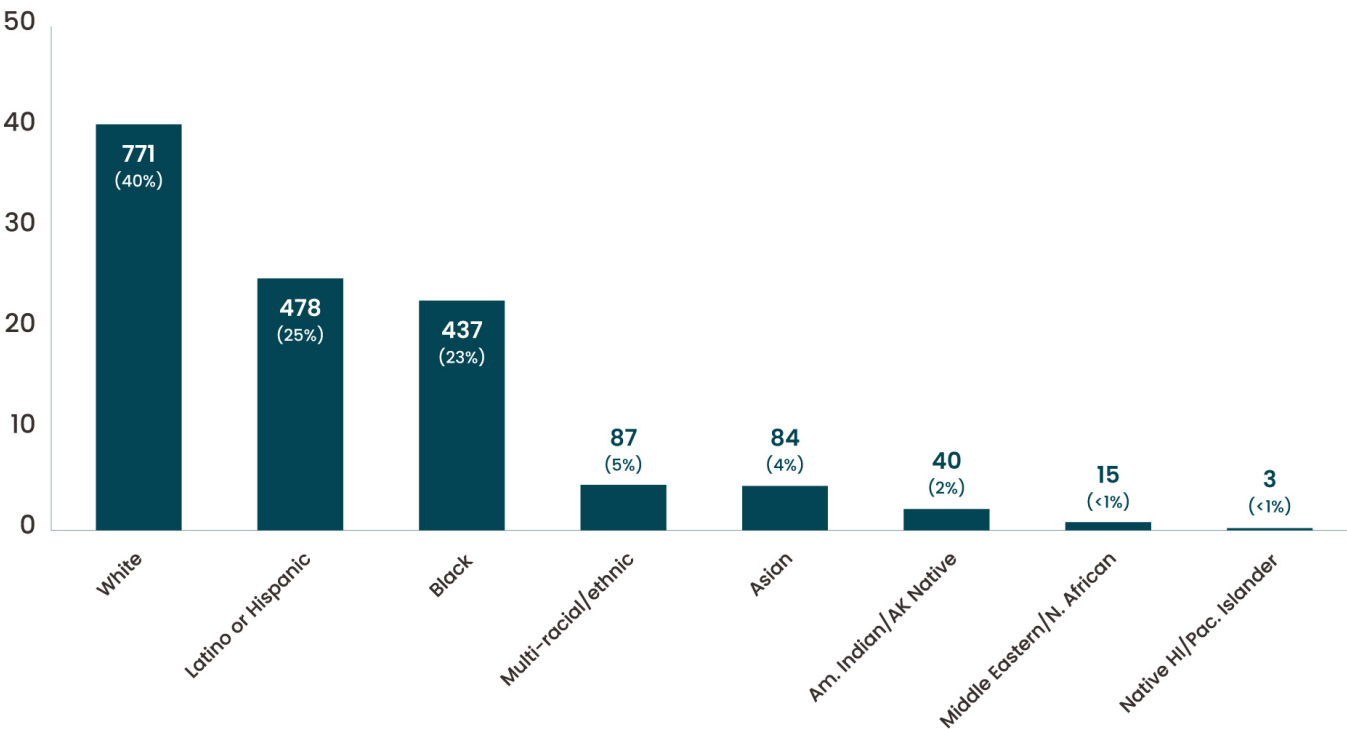


While the selected sample is not statistically representative of New Jersey on a whole, the sample covers a wide range of perspectives across New Jersey.

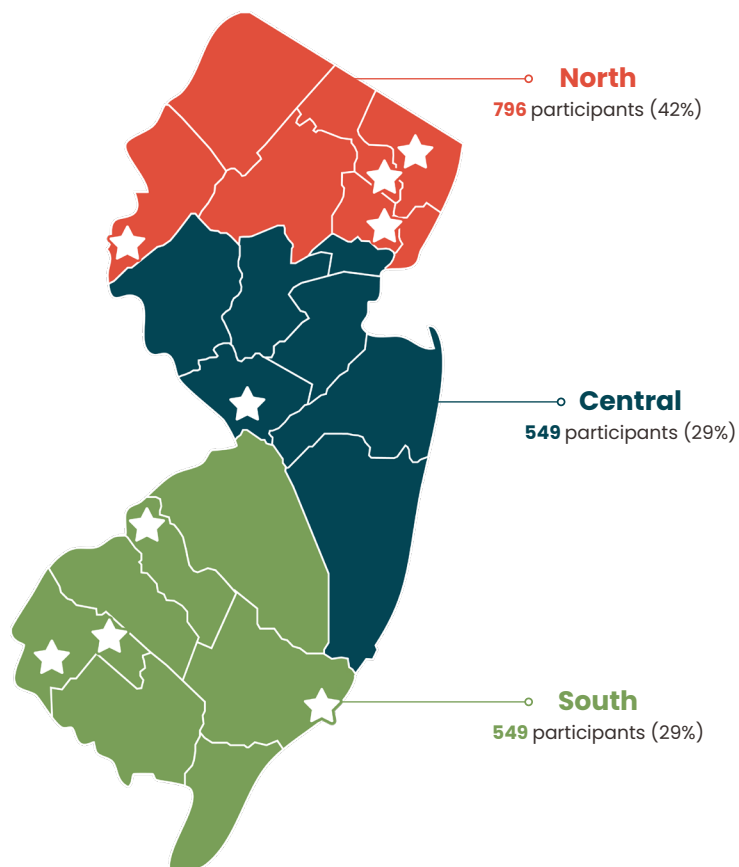
Sample characteristics of the survey sample (n=2,028):



Race/ethnicity of the survey sample (n=2,028):



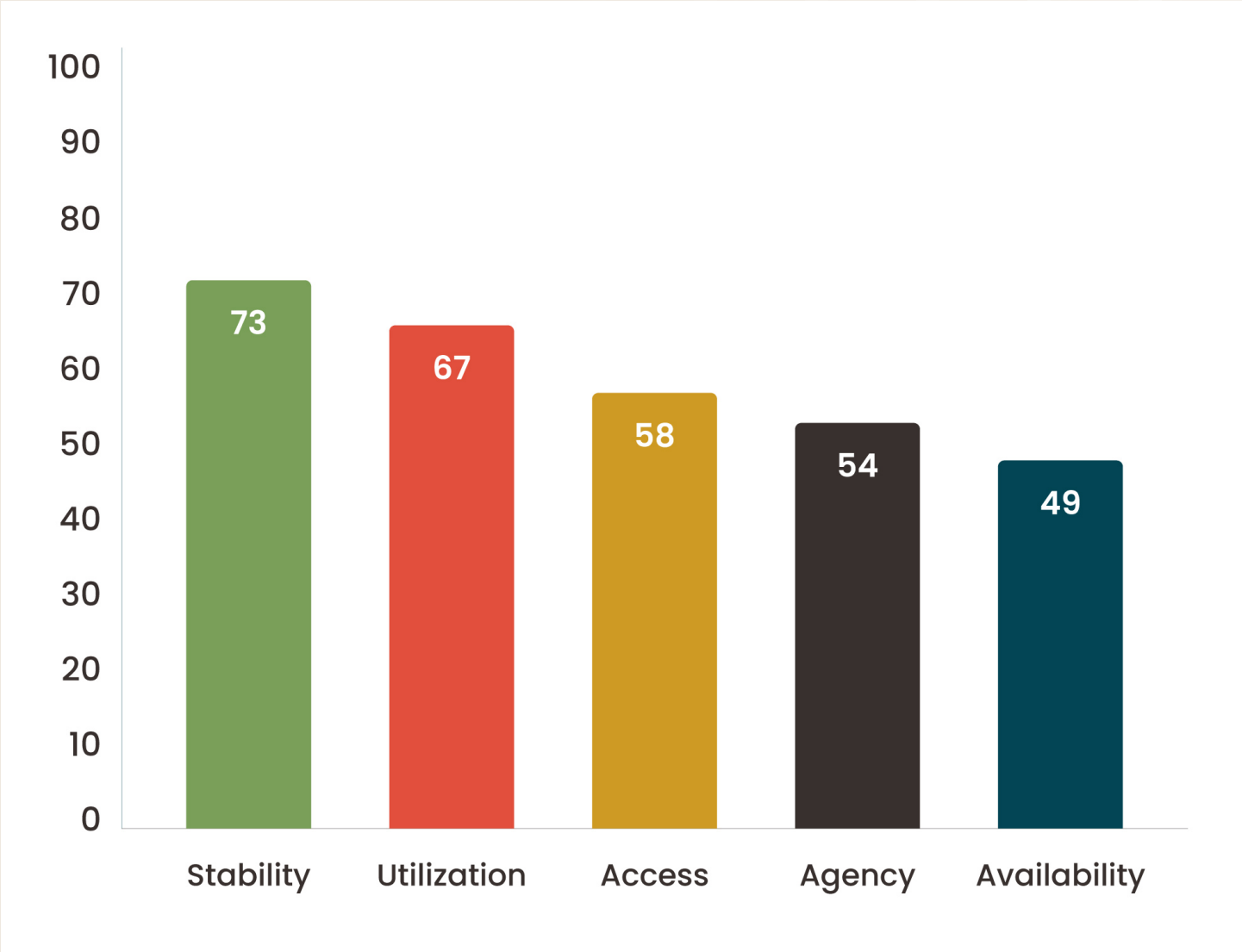
Regions in New Jersey^a



^a Counties were assigned one of the three regions based on the Office of the Governor, Official Map of Central Jersey (nj.gov/centralnj), where Central Jersey includes: Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Ocean, Somerset, and Union counties. Counties above Central Jersey were considered North Jersey and counties below Central Jersey were considered South Jersey.



Scores^b across five of the six dimensions of Food Security in New Jersey
(Statewide sample, n=2,028)



^b Scores are standardized to 0–100 scale, with higher scores being more desirable.

Stability: Reported food access stability across seasons of the year.

Utilization: Reported ability to make healthy meals from food one can access.

Access: Perceived economic access to enough food.

Agency: Perceived ability to act on one’s own food choices, and engage in processes that shape the food system.

Availability: Perceived availability of healthy and liked foods at food stores.



Below are the results for **five** dimensions of food security across the whole sample. Higher scores indicate more favorable outcomes for each dimension, with 100 being the highest possible score. Findings for the first five dimensions are explained in more detail in the following sections in order from highest to lowest scoring. Sustainability was assessed differently from the other five dimensions, so it was not included in the graph above. For this metric, food system experts across New Jersey were surveyed to understand their perceptions of sustainability issues, and those findings are presented below.

- **Stability**
- **Utilization**
- **Access**
- **Agency**
- **Availability**

Stability: the reliable access to foods over time

SCORE: 73/100

Key Findings:

- **46%** of food insecure households indicated they experienced monthly cycles of food insecurity.
- **42%** of food insecure households indicated they experienced seasonal cycles of food insecurity.
- Households in North and South Jersey were more likely to experience monthly cycles of food insecurity (Scoring **69/100** & **65/100**, respectively) than Central Jersey (Scoring **79/100**).

Recommendations:

- Monthly nutrition assistance programs, like SNAP and WIC, and seasonal programs like the Summer Food Service Program, might be leveraged to address monthly and seasonal food access instability.

Utilization: the ability to make healthy and safe meals with the food a household has access to

SCORE: 67/100

Key Findings:

- The most common food equipment barrier was a lack of kitchen tools and cooking equipment (**44%**).
- The most common food, skills, and time barrier was lacking healthy ingredients to make a healthy meal (**70%**).
- **42%** of households did not have access to a refrigerator, freezer, or other way to keep food from spoiling.
- Parents/caregivers faced more utilization barriers than non-parents, with utilization scores of **61/100**, compared to **73/100**, respectively.

Recommendations:

- Establish programs to support households with kitchen equipment and expand access to nourishing ready-to-eat food options.



Access: *having the resources and means to obtain enough food for one's household*

SCORE: 58/100

Key Findings:

- Non-English speaking survey respondents had lower economic food access scores than English speaking respondents (**36/100** compared to **62/100**, respectively).
- Parents/caregivers had lower economic food access scores than non-parents (**45/100** compared to **65/100**, respectively).
- Households in North Jersey scored **55/100** and South Jersey scored **50/100** for economic food access, both lower than Central Jersey scoring **71/100**.

Recommendations:

- Simplify SNAP, WIC, and Summer EBT enrollment processes and increase outreach to maximize participation.
- Emphasize language access in all social support/safety net programs.
- Increase support for parents to reduce financial strain and improve household food security, especially young and low-income parents/caregivers.

Agency: *the power to make decisions about foods eaten and produced*

SCORE: 54/100

Key Findings:

- Agency, both in terms of being able to act on one's own food choices and being able to engage with and shape the food system were among the lower scoring metrics.
- Parents/caregivers scored lower than non-parents (**50/100** compared to **67/100**, respectively).
- SNAP, WIC, and food pantry clients all need support for agency (scoring **42/100**, **43/100**, and **39/100**, respectively).

Recommendations:

- Promote client-choice food pantry models with healthy food options.
- Create inclusive governance models that allow residents experiencing food insecurity to help shape food policy and programs.

Availability: the physical presence of foods

SCORE: 49/100

Key Findings:

- Parents/caregivers scored lower than non-parents (**35/100** compared to **56/100**, respectively).
- Non-English speaking survey respondents scored lower than English speakers (**28/100** compared to **52/100**, respectively).
- Respondents in North (**46/100**) and South Jersey (**42/100**) scored lower than respondents in Central Jersey (**60/100**).

Recommendations:

- Expand efforts to increase the availability of affordable fruits, vegetables, and culturally preferred foods in grocery stores and food pantries.
- Invest in new and existing grocery retailers and farmers markets in underserved areas to expand availability of nourishing food.





Sustainability: the food system’s ability to provide long-term food security

Key Findings:

To promote a more sustainable food system and ensure adequate food supplies for future generations, both residents and food system experts agreed that focusing on supporting farmers (e.g., through technical assistance and funding), reducing food waste, promoting food affordability, and ensuring that food system activities are safe for the environment were top priorities.

WHICH SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES ARE HIGHEST PRIORITY TO ADDRESS IN NJ?

Reducing the cost of growing food is a high priority issue.



Making it easier to access federal food assistance programs is a high priority issue.



Supporting underrepresented farmers is a high priority issue.



Protecting farm operations in extreme weather is a high priority issue.



Supporting farmers to adapt to changing weather patterns is a high priority issue.



Recommendations:

- Expand grants, technical assistance, infrastructure to promote financial viability and resiliency of New Jersey farmers and reduce production costs and prices for consumers.
- Provide support to help farmers adapt to changing weather patterns and extreme climate events.
- Support farming cooperatives among small and mid-size farms to increase efficiency and market power.
- Prioritize funding, land access, and business support for first-generation and historically underrepresented farmers.
- Expand education, training, mentoring, and financial support for current and future farmers to strengthen business management, regulatory compliance, and adoption of sustainable practices.
- Promote living wages and fair labor standards across the food system.
- Emphasize and promote environmental protections across food production, processing, and distribution.
- Support programs enabling donation of edible surplus food and promote composting or diversion of inedible food waste from landfills.

Please note that OFSA highly recommends that readers proceed to the full report in order to gain a more robust understanding of the recommendations that are outlined in this executive summary.

**For access to the full report,
please visit OFSA's website.**

