

DECEMBER 2025

Primer on the Six Dimensions of Food Security in New Jersey

Acknowledgements:

This iteration of the data chart book was prepared by Dr. Jennifer Schrum of the New Jersey Office of the Food Security Advocate and Katie Jacobs of Hunger Solutions Consulting, with special assistance from Becca Jensen Compton.



Purpose of this Primer

This primer introduces the Six Dimensions of Food Security Conceptual Framework (the Framework) and the definition of food security adopted by the New Jersey Office of the Food Security Advocate (OFSA) to ground its work. This primer is designed to build a shared understanding of the Framework among partners, clarify how the Framework connects to real conditions across the state, and offer a foundation for coordinated action.

This primer is intended to support and inform anyone engaged in decision-making, planning, community work, service delivery, philanthropy, policy, healthcare, or systems development related to food security efforts in their own work.

What is Food Security?

Food security is often represented as “having enough food”. However, food security is a complex social condition with continually changing and interacting factors with underlying causes. There are multiple ways to define, conceptualize, and measure food security. OFSA has adopted a definition of food security from the United Nations’ High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition found in the [Food Security and Nutrition: Building a Global Narrative Towards 2030 report](#). Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.”

This definition is based on six dimensions of food security: availability, access, utilization, stability, agency, and sustainability. Food insecurity may result

from limitations in any of the six dimensions as each depends on and interacts with the others.

In New Jersey, where food needs vary widely across communities, this definition resonates significantly. Centering this definition means that achieving food security across the state requires thinking beyond just immediate responses and addressing challenges through varied approaches, from community-driven initiatives to broad policy solutions.

Why This Matters Now

New Jersey faces a paradox: we are a state with a strong agricultural legacy, abundant food retail, and growing nutrition policy infrastructure. Yet food insecurity persists at significant and inequitable rates. Nearly 1.1 million residents (11.7%) experience food insecurity, and the burden falls disproportionately on Black, Latino, immigrant, and single-mother households.¹ Children experience higher food insecurity rates than the population overall, signaling a need for early intervention and systems designed with family realities in mind.

Economic pressures, including the cost of living, rising housing costs, inflation, and wage stagnation, shape whether families can reliably purchase sufficient and nutritious food. Meanwhile, food environments differ dramatically across the state. Some communities have multiple grocery stores and culturally relevant offerings, while others rely primarily on retailers that may not meet nutritional or cultural needs.

Overlay this with climate vulnerability, unstable supply chains, shrinking farmland, and workforce pressures; and the result is a food system increasingly challenged to provide equitable, stable, and sustainable access.



¹ [Feeding America: Map the Meal Gap, 2023](#)

The Six Dimensions of Food Security Framework

The six dimensions help us see food security as a dynamic system rather than a single outcome. Each dimension represents a necessary condition for food security, and none is sufficient on its own. For example, food may be physically present in a community (availability), but if people cannot afford it (access), cannot prepare it safely (utilization), or lack culturally meaningful options (agency), then food security has not been achieved.

Six Dimensions of Food Security

ACCESS

Access is the resources and means to obtain foods.

Access refers to individual or household resources and means needed to obtain appropriate and nutritious foods. This includes both economic and physical resources. This dimension also considers the level of resources needed to ensure that access to food does not compromise satisfactory access to other basic needs like housing or health care.

AVAILABILITY

Availability is the physical presence of foods.

Availability refers to individuals having enough quantity and sufficient quality of foods physically present in a person's environment. This includes the supply and distribution of foods at stores, markets, gardens, and other places where individuals obtain food.

UTILIZATION

Utilization is the intake of sufficient and safe foods.

It refers to the intake of sufficient and safe food and water to meet nutritional needs. This includes

individuals' knowledge, skills, and confidence in planning meals and buying, preparing, and cooking foods. It also includes their access to food safety knowledge, skills, tools, and resources.

STABILITY

Stability is the reliable supply of foods over time.

Stability in food security refers to maintaining adequacy in food availability, access, and utilization over time. Stability in these dimensions must be maintained during sudden, short-term shocks and cyclical or seasonal changes. For example, the ability to maintain food availability, access, and utilization during a seasonal job layoff, the onset of a health condition, periods of inflation, or natural disaster.

AGENCY

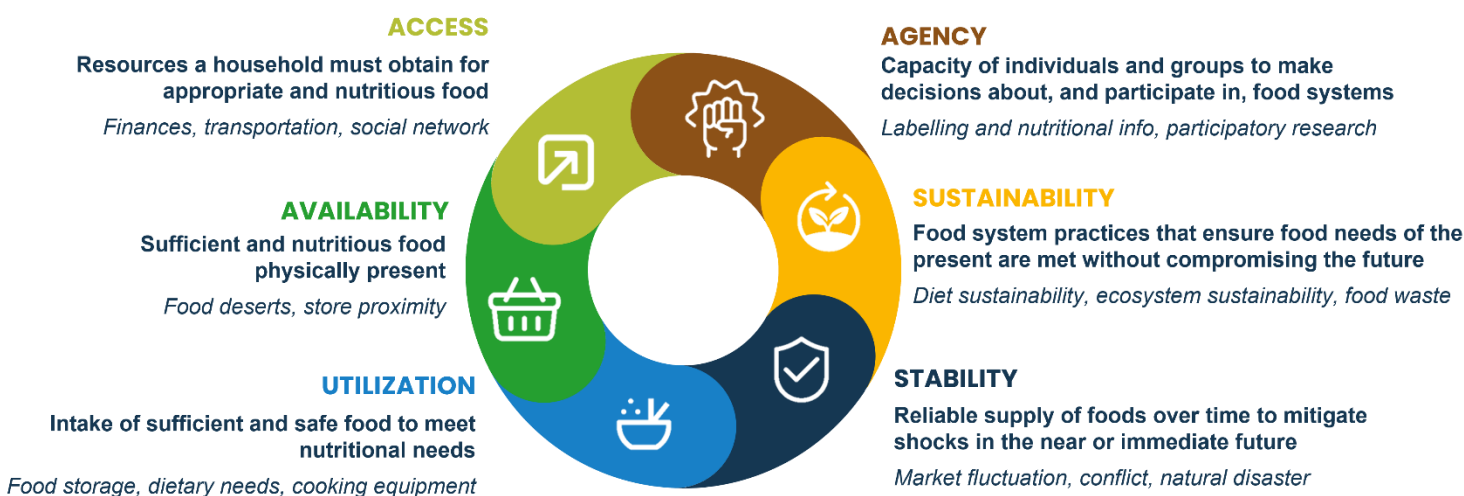
Agency is the power to make decisions about foods eaten and produced.

As a dimension of food security, agency refers to individuals' and communities' capacity to make decisions and take actions to shape their own relationships with food and food systems. This includes making choices about what they eat, the foods they produce, and how they are produced, processed, and distributed.

SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability is the food system's ability to provide long-term food security.

It refers to food system practices that contribute to the long-term regeneration of natural, social, and economic systems, ensuring the food needs of present generations are met without compromising the food needs of future generations.



Call to Action

Achieving food security in New Jersey is a tangible goal with meaningful food security initiatives already underway throughout the state. Long-term success requires sustained alignment, shared responsibility, and action across sectors.

Every sector and every person in New Jersey influences one or more of the dimensions. Whether you work in policy, direct service, planning, funding, education, health, business, agriculture, research, or community leadership, you have a role in shaping a food system where every resident can reliably access and choose the food that meets their needs and reflects their identity and dignity. Policymakers can shape regulations and budgets that reinforce stability and long-term sustainability. Community-based organizations can ensure dignity and agency in service delivery. Philanthropy can resource innovation and fill structural gaps. Healthcare, education, agriculture, transportation, and workforce systems can shape conditions that support food access and availability.

We invite you to begin leveraging this Framework by reflecting on how your current work touches one or more of the dimensions and considering where gaps, opportunities, or assumptions may exist. This Framework is already informing statewide planning, funding conversations, research, and community strategy, but its greatest value emerges when it becomes a shared language. It can be used to design programs, evaluate system gaps, frame investment decisions, build partnerships, inform legislation, and help partners align their work across sectors.

To support this reflection, explore existing food security work across New Jersey in the next section of this primer where the Framework is already being put into practice. From innovative food access models, Food Is Medicine initiatives, bi-directional community engagement practices, investments in sustainability and resilience, and cross-sector partnerships that move beyond transactional responses to systemic solutions, food security work is robust in New Jersey. As more organizations adopt the Framework, collective understanding and coordination will continue to grow, strengthening statewide progress.

Additionally, the [New Jersey Food Security Strategic Plan](#) expands on this primer and offers concrete focus areas, strategies, tools, and pathways to action for partners across the state. Together, by aligning our work to a shared Framework, New Jersey can build a food system that is equitable, resilient, community-informed, and built to last.

New Jersey Food Security Work Across Dimensions

The following are a selection of NJ federal and state programs working within one or more dimensions of food security. A wide-ranging scope of these programs highlights the importance of diverse programming to address dynamic food security needs.

Food Desert Relief Program

The New Jersey Economic Development Authority (NJEDA) administers six food security programs, including the Food Equity and Economic Development in NJ (FEED NJ) grant program and the Food Desert Supermarket Tax Credit program, established by the Food Desert Relief Act in 2020.² The FDRA provides \$240 million in tax credits, loans, grants, and/or technical assistance to increase access to nutritious food as well as develop strategies for alleviating food deserts.³

Food Retail Innovation in Delivery Grant

The Food Retail Innovation in Delivery Grant (FRIDG) is administered by NJEDA. This grant subsidizes 30-50% of the costs associated with procurement and installation of temperature-controlled lockers, which supports expansion of food delivery options and increases food access for residents of defined food desert communities.⁴

Child Nutrition Programs

The New Jersey Department of Agriculture administers the federal child nutrition programs. These programs enable schools and childcare agencies to operate meal programs that provide nutritious meals daily.⁵ Currently, over 700 school districts participate in these

² NJEDA. [Rules for Food Desert Relief Tax Credit Program](#)

³ NJEDA. [Food Desert Relief Program](#).

⁴ New Jersey Economic Development Authority.

⁵ NJ Department of Agriculture. [School Nutrition Programs](#).

programs in New Jersey.⁶ The New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) administers the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), which provides nutrition and breastfeeding education, nutritious foods, and improved access to regular health care and social services to low and moderate-income pregnant, postpartum and breastfeeding individuals and young children with, or at risk of developing nutrition-related health problems.⁷

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

The Department of Human Services (DHS) administers the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) program which provides food assistance to families with low incomes to help them buy groceries through a benefits card accepted in most food retail stores and some farmers markets.⁸ Participants in this program are eligible for a minimum monthly benefit amount of \$95.⁹

Public Health & Food Protection Program

The New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) Public Health and Food Protection Program protects the public through inspection of foods and communication to the public, retail food establishments, and local health departments about food and water safety policies and issues.¹⁰

Home Visitation Nutrition Education

The New Jersey Department of Children and Families' (DCF) offers a variety of home visitation programs.¹¹ The Department also recently implemented the Family Connects NJ program. Through these programs, professionals visit the home during pregnancy and postpartum to engage with families to encourage positive behaviors and healthy nutrition to prevent poor pregnancy outcomes.¹²

Combatting College Hunger

The 2019 Hunger-Free Campus Act is administered through the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education

(OSHE). Through the Act, a "Hunger-Free Campus" grant was established to combat food security among students at NJ public colleges and universities. OSHE has released the "Enhancing New Jersey College Students' Access to Food, Housing, and Other Basic Needs Supports" playbook in collaboration with The Hope Center for Community, College, and Justice. In addition, the NJ Office of Innovation also developed the College Support Resource Hub (BasicNeeds.NJ.gov); which acts as a central source of aggregated information college students can use when seeking support with meeting their basic needs.¹³

Organic, Sustainable Regenerative Agriculture Program (OSRA)

The NJ Department of Agriculture's OSRA Program is an education and outreach program designed to provide educational materials and assistance to New Jersey farmers and consumers interested in the techniques and benefits of sustainable, regenerative, and organic agricultural practices.

WIC & Seniors Farmers Market Nutrition Programs (FMNP)

Administered by the NJ Department of Agriculture and NJDOH, Farmers Market Nutrition Programs provide WIC recipients and eligible seniors with additional benefits during summer (June-November) that can be redeemed for fresh fruits, vegetables, and herbs grown by local NJ farmers who are recruited and trained to be Certified Farmer Vendors in the program.

Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

The Department of Agriculture's Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) serves nutritious meals and snacks to eligible participants enrolled for care at participating day care centers and day care homes. The program promotes the development of basic nutritional concepts and provides nutritious, well-balanced meals. CACFP also provides meals to children residing in homeless shelters and snacks to youths participating in after-school care programs.

⁶ Assistant Secretary's Report to the NJ State Board of Agriculture.

⁷ New Jersey Department of Health. [New Jersey WIC](#).

⁸ New Jersey Department of Human Services. [NJ SNAP](#).

⁹ NJ Department of Human Services. [Who is Eligible for SNAP?](#)

¹⁰ NJDOH. [Public Health and Food Protection Program](#).

¹¹ NJ DCF. [FAQs for Pregnant Women and Families](#).

¹² NJ DCF. [Home Visitation Programs](#).

¹³ Office of Innovation. [BasicNeeds.NJ.gov](#)