

# NEW JERSEY

## Food Security 3-Year Strategic Plan

2026



Office of the  
Food Security  
Advocate

A COLLECTIVE, FOCUSED DIRECTION FOR ADVANCING  
MULTI-DIMENSIONAL FOOD SECURITY FOR ALL

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# Acknowledgments

## About the New Jersey Office of the Food Security Advocate (OFSA)

The New Jersey Office of the Food Security Advocate (OFSA) is the first and only state-level food security office in the United States housed within a Governor's Office and with its own independent team and budget. OFSA began its work in September 2022 to advance a coordinated, upstream approach to promoting food security across New Jersey. Grounded in the belief that food security is fundamental to the health and prosperity of every community, OFSA works across State agencies, philanthropy, and community partners to build a more community-centered, resilient, and data-informed food security system. OFSA supports State agencies in implementing and evaluating food security efforts and projects with shared goals, advances policies and practices that align with the Six Dimensions of Food Security Conceptual Framework (the Framework), collaborates with philanthropy and the private sector to expand innovation and investment, and engages communities to lead food security work from their communities outward. Physically located within and supported by the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, OFSA serves as a convener, connector, and

catalyst. OFSA brings together resident leaders, community organizations, food banks, farmers, State agencies, and local governments to make lasting food security a reality for everyone in New Jersey.

OFSA would like to thank the following individuals and organizations for sharing their time and expertise in shaping the collectively defined New Jersey Food Security 3-Year Strategic Plan. In addition to those listed below, OFSA would like to acknowledge partners in the legislature and State agency partners for the insights and support they shared throughout this entire process. OFSA would also like to acknowledge all the food security leaders throughout the state who commit endless time and resources to ensure New Jersey individuals and families are supported with access to the resources they need. This Strategic Plan is informed by these leaders and the work they do every day in their communities and behind the scenes. Finally, OFSA would like to thank the New Jerseyans who shared their thoughts, experiences and stories that informed the reports and data used to create this plan.

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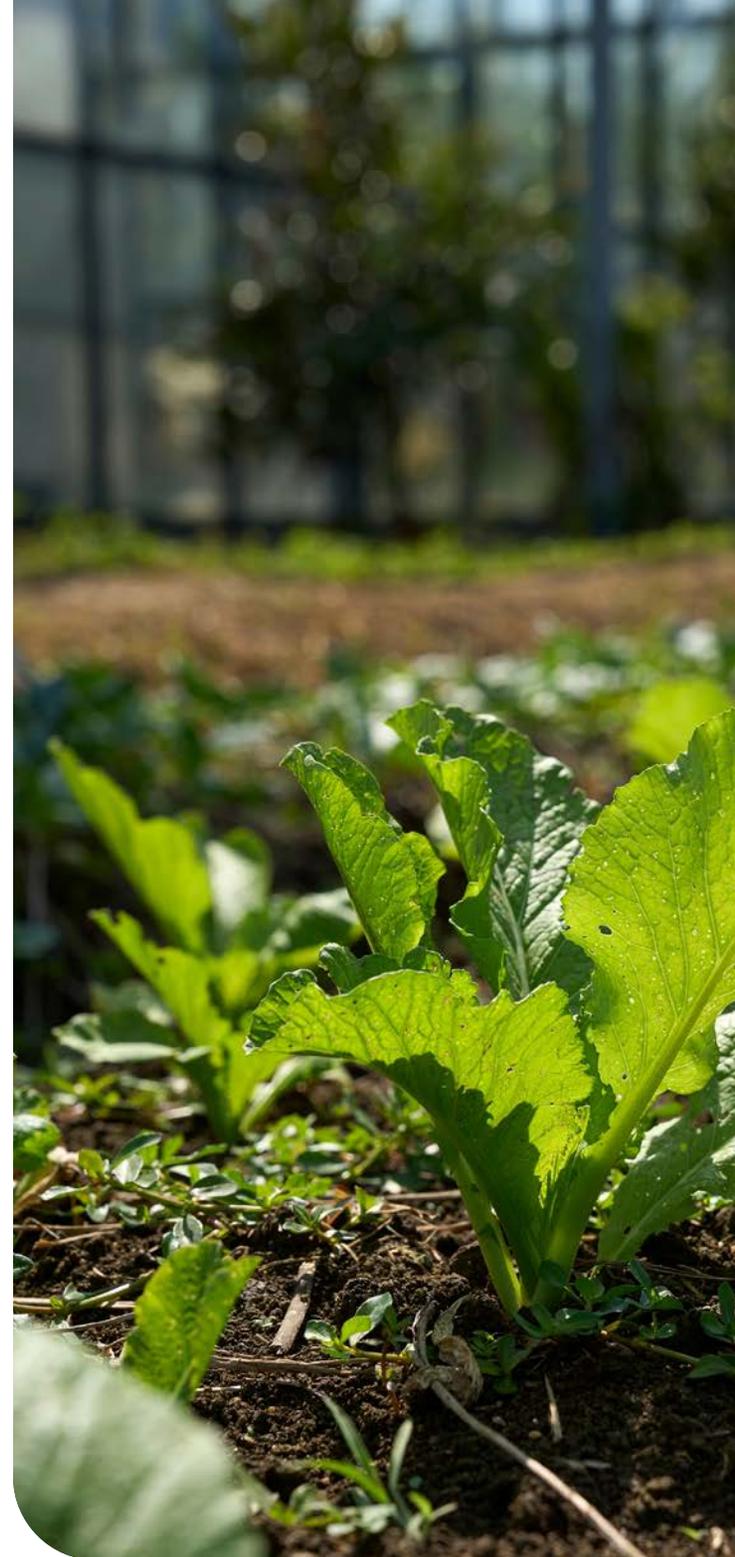
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# A Letter from the Executive Director

Dear friends,

I am incredibly excited and proud to welcome you all to view New Jersey's Food Security Strategic Plan, shaped by communities across the state, and shared by the New Jersey Office of the Food Security Advocate (OFSA). In 2021, legislation was drafted to create OFSA, and we began our work in 2022. OFSA, established by N.J.S.A. 52:27J-3, is responsible for coordinating food security efforts for the state of New Jersey.

One of the most important mandates of OFSA is "working with State and community partners to develop a strategic plan to address identified gaps in areas that are underserved by current food insecurity programs." When OFSA began its work, we ensured that our efforts would be grounded in two key principles: valuing research and evaluation, and honoring community voices. We focused on these areas to build consensus and collaboration among multiple sectors. As an office, we continue to believe that all the work that has been done prior to the creation of OFSA, and all the work that will continue to be done, must be respected, lifted up, and connected within the Strategic Plan. We also believe that lasting systems change in New Jersey must have sustainable collaboration between as many sectors that are working in the food security space as possible.

As we look forward to the future, our consensus and partnership will now be infused with a more robust focus and direction. Thanks to the efforts of Dr. Jenny Schrum, our Director of Research and Evaluation, OFSA is now able to coordinate New Jersey's food security efforts through the lens of a Strategic Plan that highlights the importance of data, emphasizes the crucial role of local agriculture and resilient food systems, and advocates for coordination and collective impact at all levels. This is not a plan that tells New Jersey what to do. Rather, this is a plan that invites all New Jerseyans to see their

food security work and everyday connection to the food system through a more holistic lens that acknowledges food insecurity as a highly complex, socio-economic issue. Moreover, such a multifaceted issue requires brave innovation and fierce dreaming between multiple sectors.

The sharing of the New Jersey Food Security Strategic Plan is not the end of the road for this process. This is the beginning of a journey to build a better tomorrow for New Jersey families. It will take all of us, working together, and elevating each other, to create a more food secure state.

Onward and upward, my friends.

Sincerely,



**Mark Dinglasan**  
Executive Director  
NJ Office of the Food Security Advocate



# Introduction

## Food Insecurity in New Jersey

New Jersey, though one of the geographically smallest states in the United States (U.S.), is among the most densely populated, with more than 9.5 million residents.<sup>1</sup> The state's landscape is varied, encompassing major urban areas, sprawling suburban communities, and approximately 10,000 farms with a \$1.5 billion agricultural economy,<sup>2</sup> that help feed local communities and contribute to the broader national food system.<sup>3</sup> Despite the agricultural presence and economic diversity, food insecurity remains a persistent challenge.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's definition of food insecurity, households that experience food insecurity have difficulty, at some time during the year, providing enough food for all their members because of a lack of money or other resources. In New Jersey one in every 10 households (9.8% or 347,000 households) experienced food insecurity in 2021-2023 (three-year average).<sup>4</sup>

Additionally, Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap (informed by USDA food insecurity measures) reported in 2023 that an estimated 1.1 million New Jersey residents experienced food insecurity, representing 11.7% of the state's population compared to 14.3% nationally.<sup>5</sup> Statewide trends show worsening of these rates. From 2020 to



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2023, overall food insecurity in New Jersey rose from 7.4% to 11.7%, and child food insecurity increased from 9% to 13.5%.

- ▶ Food insecurity was higher among children. In 2023 approximately 271,650 (13.5%) children lived in households without consistent access to adequate food.
- ▶ Significant disparities persist across racial and ethnic groups. In 2023, 24% of Black (all ethnicities) and 22% of Latino<sup>6</sup> individuals experienced food insecurity, compared to 7% of white individuals. While food insecurity increased for all racial and ethnic groups between 2020 and 2023, the magnitude of increase was greater among Black and Latino residents.

Rising food insecurity, and related group disparities, in New Jersey carries significant

and measurable consequences for residents, communities, and public systems. As outlined in the [2025 State of Food Security in New Jersey: A Data Chart Book](#), these impacts are wide-ranging and reinforce the urgency of coordinated, systems-level action. Key impacts include:

- ▶ Higher health risks and costs, including increased rates of chronic disease, diet-related illness, hospitalizations, and poor birth outcomes.
- ▶ Greater economic instability, as households face tradeoffs between food, housing, healthcare, childcare, and transportation.
- ▶ Racial and ethnic disparities that have been worsening over time, with disproportionately higher burden among Black and Latino (Hispanic) residents, deepening inequities across health, economic opportunity, and child well-being.

- ▶ Heightened vulnerability for children, who experience greater developmental, educational, and long-term health risks when household food access is inconsistent.
- ▶ Increased strain on emergency food systems and public services, including food banks, local governments, healthcare providers, and nutrition assistance programs.
- ▶ Reduced community and household resilience, as rising need, instability, and cost pressures make it more difficult for families to recover from economic or climate-related shocks.

Together, these trends and impacts demonstrate that food insecurity is a complex social condition with broad implications for public health, economic mobility, equity, and long-term resilience. Additionally, they underscore the need for coordinated, cross-sector action that informs the Strategic Plan.

For additional insights on measures of food security in New Jersey, OFSA recommends exploring the [Trenton Health Team NJ Statewide Food Insecurity Index](#), the [New Jersey Food System Dashboard](#), literature analyzed to inform the Strategic Plan (**Appendix 2**), [OFSA’s Data Chart Book](#), and [OFSA’s Public Data Catalog](#).

## The Six Dimensions of Food Security Framework

The rates of food insecurity presented above reflect the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s and Feeding America’s measures and definitions of food security. These are not exhaustive indicators of the social issue and there are additional ways to understand, conceptualize, and measure food security. To ground New Jersey’s food security work in a holistic and human-centered view that provides a clearer, more complete understanding of why food insecurity happens and how systems must respond, this Strategic Plan anchors itself in the following definition of food security.

Food security exists when “...all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.”<sup>7,8</sup> This definition embraces the six dimensions of food security (availability, access, utilization, stability, agency, and sustainability.<sup>9,10,11,12</sup>) that ground New Jersey’s food security work (see **Figure 1**). The Six Dimensions of Food Security Framework (the Dimensions or the Framework) is used to understand the full scope of factors necessary

**FIGURE 1 |** The Six Dimensions of Food Security reflected in the definition of food security



SOURCE: HIGH LEVEL PANEL OF EXPERTS (HLPE) ON FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION. 2020. [FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION: BUILDING A GLOBAL NARRATIVE TOWARDS 2030](#).

to achieve lasting food security. This Framework helps ensure food security efforts not only address whether food exists but also whether people can acquire it, use it healthfully, rely on it over time, shape their food environments, and sustain their food systems for the future. Each dimension can help reveal a different contributor to food insecurity, help identify targeted solutions, and steward resources efficiently (see **Figure 2** for dimension examples).

The framework offers a shared language for policymakers, practitioners, and communities, helping partners see food security as a dynamic system rather than a single outcome. It is not the responsibility of one sector or organization to resolve gaps in each dimension, but rather, identify where their existing strengths can contribute to the larger effort through collaboration. This makes it an excellent fit for New Jersey’s diverse communities and interconnected food landscape, where addressing root causes, strengthening long-term resilience, and centering dignity and cultural relevance are essential to meaningful progress.

View OFSA’s [Primer on the Six Dimensions of Food Security](#) to learn more about the six dimensions of food security in a New Jersey context.

**FIGURE 2 | The Six Dimensions of Food Security Framework with examples**



## OFSA's Legislative Mandate

The New Jersey Office of the Food Security Advocate (OFSA) was established through legislation in 2022 to reshape the state's approach to food security through systems change, collaboration, and data-driven action. Guided by [its mandate to coordinate statewide efforts and address unmet needs](#) (see **Figure 3**),

OFSA convened partners across sectors to co-develop the following New Jersey Food Security Strategic Plan (hereafter referred to as "the Strategic Plan") to ensure all New Jerseyans can better access, afford, and utilize nutritious food with dignity, stability, and choice now and for generations to come.

## Parameters and Context for the Strategic Plan

### VISION

*A sustainable New Jersey food system where all people, at all times, have continual and resilient access to foods that meet their needs and preferences now and for generations to come, and where every sector and community member sees themselves as integral to the collective effort necessary to achieve this shared vision.*

### SPECIFICITY AND AUDIENCE

#### **Providing Direction with the Opportunity for Tailoring Across Communities and Geographies**

The Strategic Plan offers a coordinated set of focus areas and strategies (see **Figure 4** for definitions) that collectively establish a common direction for New Jersey's food security efforts over the next three years. It is intentionally directional, pliable, and not prescriptive. This approach recognizes that food insecurity and the capacity to address it may look different across the state. For example, rural communities face challenges distinct from those of densely populated urban centers; suburban and coastal areas face their own unique pressures. Rather than assigning specific tactics or actions, the Strategic Plan provides a flexible framework that allows counties, municipalities, organizations, coalitions, and sectors to select Strategies most relevant to their needs and design solutions suited to their unique strengths, partnerships, resources, and local contexts. Following the release of this Plan, OFSA will release supplemental materials to support implementation efforts including an Implementation Tactics and Action Planning Toolkit (hereafter referred to as "the Implementation Toolkit").

### FIGURE 3

Excerpt from N.J.S.A. 52:27J-3<sup>17</sup>

**There is created in the Executive Branch of the State Government the Office of the Food Security Advocate... The office shall have the duty to collaborate with the appropriate State agency to:...**

- (d) coordinate communication with and between food banks;
- (e) establish best practices for food banks to reduce food waste and to distribute more fresh produce and proteins to food insecurity programs and food banks;
- (f) cooperate with research organizations and universities to monitor ongoing gap analysis that identifies areas that are undeserved by current food insecurity programs;
- (g) work with State and community partners to develop a strategic plan to address identified gaps in areas that are undeserved by current food insecurity programs;..."

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The plan is intended for a broad audience of sectors (Figure 5) that are necessary to advance food security in New Jersey. The plan encourages alignment and partnerships across sectors to drive collective impact. It's essential that every sector not only sees itself in the Strategic Plan but also takes ownership and action to assure the Plan's success.

**COMMITMENTS AND VALUES**

**Guiding Commitments and Values in Implementation**

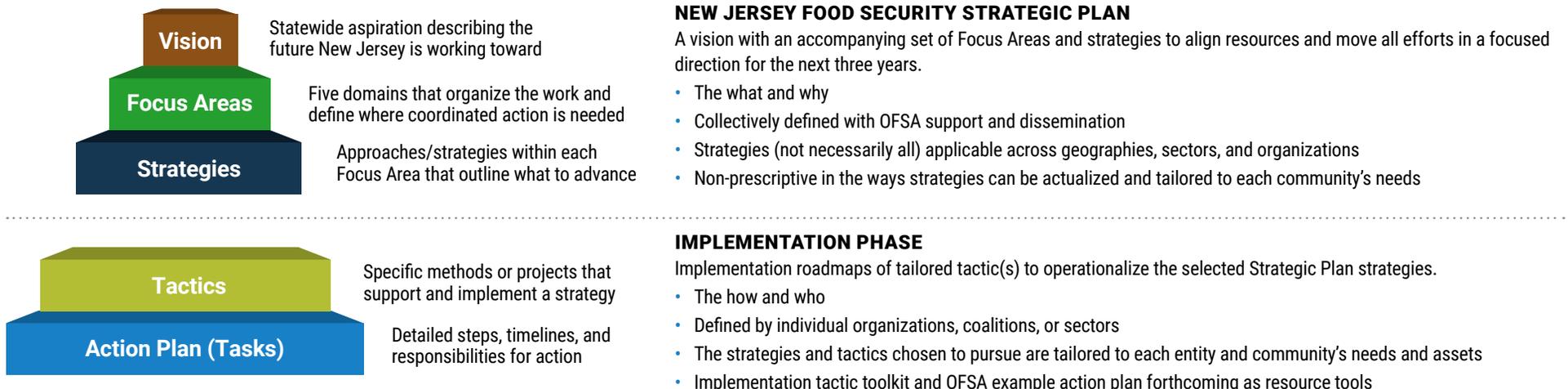
Partners across sectors consistently identified a shared set of guiding commitments and values that underpin the Strategic Plan and its future implementation:

- ▶ **Use community-informed approaches:** Ensure residents and partners with lived and living expertise guide the design, decision-making, and evaluation of initiatives.

- ▶ **Ensure equity in opportunity:** Create implementation pathways that enable participation by organizations of all sizes, not only the most established or well-resourced.
- ▶ **Prioritize a systems-change orientation:** Pursue solutions that improve coordination, infrastructure, and policies across sectors.
- ▶ **Center a cross-sector approach:** Given the Framework and definition of food security, no one sector can fully achieve food security for all; therefore, no one sector should be featured or prioritized, reflecting the shared responsibility.
- ▶ **Maximize accountability and transparency:** Track progress through shared data, clear communication, and public reporting.

- ▶ **Support data-driven continuous improvement:** Use evidence, including the New Jersey Food Insecurity Index, to inform decisions and measure impact.
- ▶ **Embrace technology and innovation:** Leverage tools and digital infrastructure to improve access, efficiency, and collaboration.
- ▶ **Focus upstream:** Address the economic and structural drivers of food insecurity alongside immediate food access needs.
- ▶ **Protect privacy and security:** Protect sensitive data while advancing transparency and trust.
- ▶ **Balance support of existing with creation of new initiatives:** Build on what works while encouraging innovation and adaptation.

**FIGURE 4 | Strategic Plan tiers**



## TIMEFRAME

### Defining A Three-Year Collective Direction

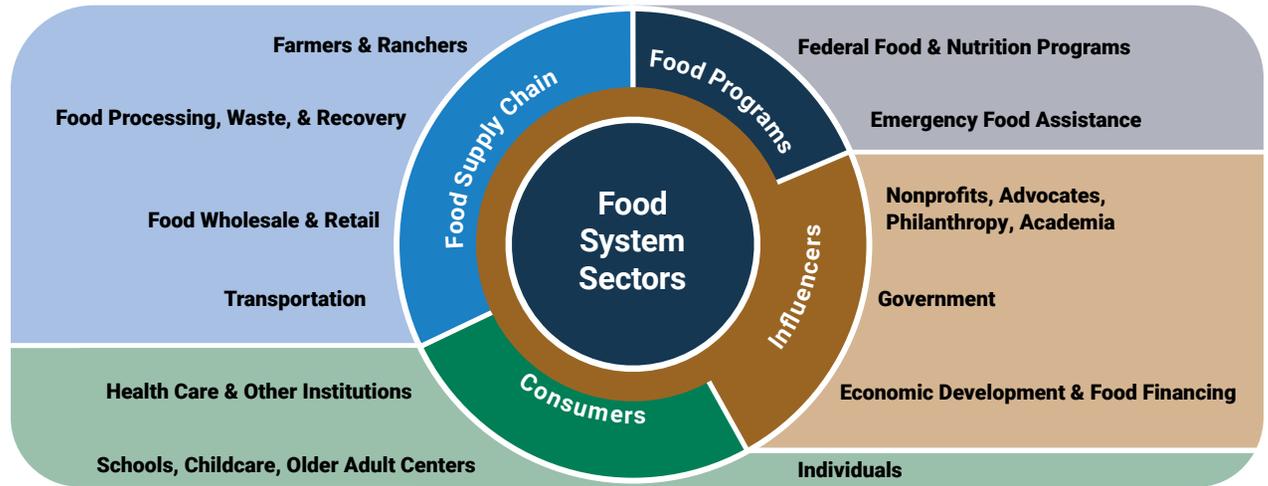
The scope of the Strategic Plan spans three years to reflect both the urgency of action and the evolving nature of food security work in New Jersey. A three-year Strategic Plan allows for steady and meaningful progress while maintaining flexibility to adapt to emerging needs, new data, and shifts in state and federal funding and policy environments. This timeframe ensures that updates to future iterations of New Jersey’s Food Security Strategic Plan are made in a timely manner to align with evolving statewide food insecurity information as well as with state budget and federal grant cycles.

## IMPLEMENTATION ENVIRONMENT

### Grounding Strategies in State Capacity, Responsive to Federal Change

This Strategic Plan is grounded in the tools, partnerships, and pathways currently available within the state of New Jersey and is designed to be actionable. While it is informed by the broader federal landscape, it is not contingent upon federal investments. The Plan recognizes that current federal policies, funding, and administrative rules can impact New Jersey’s ability to fully meet community food security needs. By building on New Jersey’s own assets and capacity for innovation, the Plan charts a resilient path that complements federal programs but is not defined by them. Changes in federal policies may strengthen or impede

FIGURE 5 | Sectors impacting and necessary to advance food security



SOURCE: FOOD RESEARCH & ACTION CENTER, LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS OF HUNGER AND ITS SOLUTIONS IN NEW JERSEY.

implementation, but the strategies outlined in the Plan are intentionally designed to stand on their own.

## SECTOR-SPECIFIC SUPPLEMENTS

### Aligning with Sector-Specific Efforts

The statewide Strategic Plan is complemented by two supplemental resources tailored to specific sectors that are deeply ingrained in food security work. Please [contact OFSA](#) for questions or collaboration opportunities.

- ▶ **Charitable Food Sector Recommendations:** In accordance with OFSA’s mandate to “coordinate communication with and between food banks” and “establish best practices for food banks to reduce food waste and to distribute more fresh

produce and proteins to food insecurity programs and food banks,” OFSA facilitated a multi-pronged process with charitable food sector partners across the state to identify strategies and tactics for the sector that will be disseminated with future supporting resources of the Strategic Plan.

- ▶ **School Meals Recommendations:** [Legislation enacted in January 2024](#) directed OFSA to lead a Working Group in developing recommendations for expanding access to and utilization of school meals. This work is nearing completion as of the time of publication of this Strategic Plan and will culminate in a separate set of recommendations specific to this sector.

# Overview of the *Exploring the Six Dimensions of Food Security in New Jersey Report*: Informing the Strategic Plan

As OFSA finalized the [parameters to the Strategic Plan](#), the Office worked to deepen its understanding of the status of each dimension of food security in New Jersey, including where gaps and opportunities exist. OFSA partnered with the [Center for Nutrition & Health Impact \(CNHI\)](#), a national nonprofit nutrition research center, to develop and implement a set of survey measures framed around the six dimensions of food security. The measures are designed to understand residents' lived and living experiences and perceptions across all six dimensions.

This data collection initiative aimed to inform OFSA's Strategic Plan to ultimately guide cross-sector collaboration and policy development across the state. The following section outlines select key metrics and results from the report, [Exploring the Six Dimensions of Food Security in New Jersey](#) (hereafter referred to as the *Exploring the Six Dimensions Report*). We encourage you to review the full report for a more comprehensive review and analyses of these data.

## Study Overview and Brief Methods

From January–July 2025, CNHI partnered with Qualtrics and organizations across New Jersey to collect surveys for each of the six dimensions of food security. Based on the survey responses, metrics and quantitative findings were generated. Survey weights were created based on demographic variables to make findings more representative of the general population of New Jersey. For the first five dimensions of food security (access, availability, utilization, stability, and agency), thirteen metrics were reported from validated scales and sub-scales within the survey. Because all the metrics had different scoring approaches, the scores were standardized to a 0-100 range with higher scores indicating better food security. For the sixth dimension (sustainability), both New Jersey community members and food system experts were asked their opinions across several sustainability topics. Respondents were asked about four categories of food system sustainability issues, based on their areas of expertise: 1) Nutrition Security and Food Affordability, 2) Agriculture and Land Use, 3) Food System Economy, and 4) Food System Resilience.

Respondents were asked to rate how well New Jersey was doing across 35 issues within the four categories and then asked to indicate which were the highest priorities to address.

### **NEW JERSEY COMMUNITY MEMBER SURVEY (TOTAL N=2,028)**

#### **Phase 1. Statewide Sample (n = 974):**

A statewide sample collected via a Qualtrics survey panel.

#### **Phase 2. Oversampling in Specific Communities (n = 1,054):**

Additional surveys from nine areas that were identified as experiencing high rates of food insecurity (Atlantic City, Camden City, Garfield, Newark, Paterson, Pittsgrove, Phillipsburg, Trenton, Salem). Participants were recruited through food pantries, shelters, and resource hubs.

### **FOOD SYSTEM EXPERT SURVEY (N=61)**

#### **Phase 3. New Jersey Food System Expert**

**Sample (n = 61):** Sustainability-focused surveys administered to multi-sector food system content experts, recruited through the Strategic Plan's Executive Committee.

## New Jersey Community Member Survey Results

### DIMENSIONS: AVAILABILITY, ACCESS, UTILIZATION, STABILITY, AND AGENCY

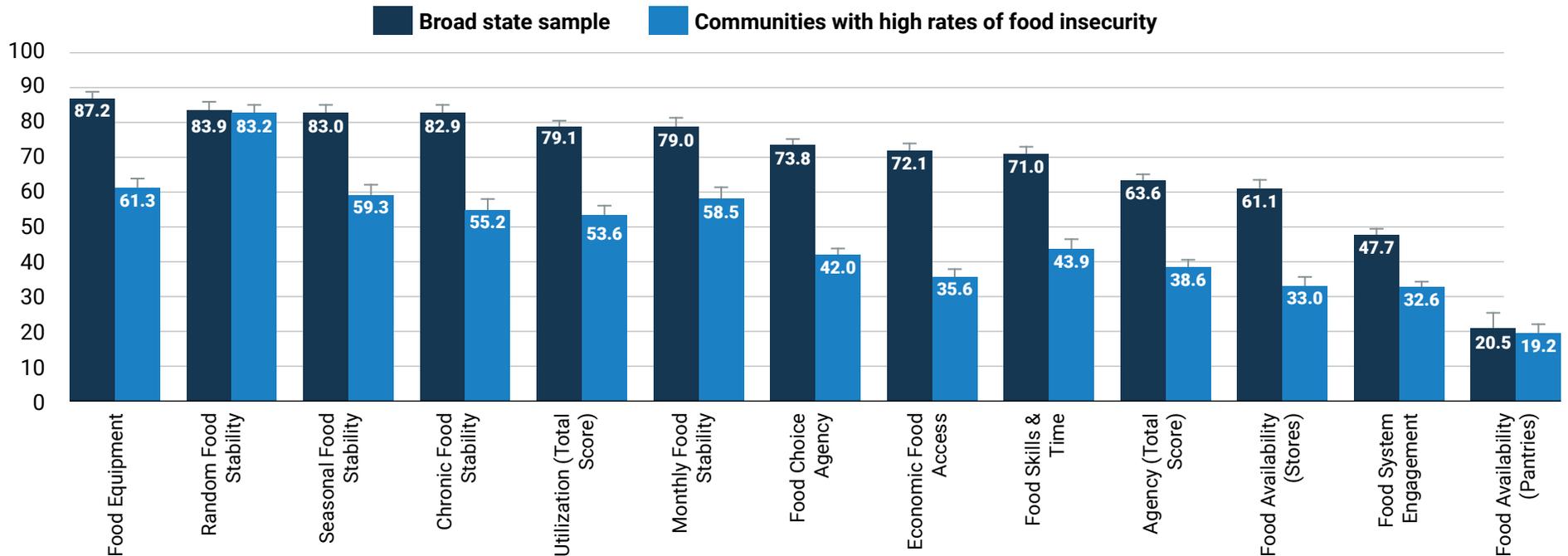
CNHI examined scores for the first five food security dimensions among the whole sample (phase 1 and 2). While there was demographic variety and representation of many groups within the sample, survey respondents (n=2,028) were majority women (60.2%), about half were under the age of 50 (52.8%), and most were either non-Hispanic White (40.3%), Latino/Hispanic (25.0%),

or non-Hispanic Black (22.8%). Respondents tended to live within lower-income households (70.0% made <\$4,001 per month), with two or more adults (75.5%), and within urban counties (81.7%).

**Figure 6** shows each of the thirteen metrics for the five dimensions of food security between the broad statewide sample to the sample recruited from nine

communities. Higher scores indicate better food security with respect to that metric, with 100 indicating the highest possible score for the metric. Compared to the broad statewide sample, the participants from communities with identified high rates of food insecurity scored lower for nearly every metric. Particularly large disparities were seen for food choice agency, economic food access, perceived availability

**FIGURE 6** | Scores<sup>a</sup> across 13 metrics that assess five of the six dimensions of food security in New Jersey: Comparing the broad statewide sample (n=974) to the sample from 9 New Jersey communities with high rates of food insecurity (n=1,054)



<sup>a</sup> Scores are standardized to 0-100 scale, with higher scores indicating greater food security in that dimension (more desirable).

SOURCE: CENTER FOR NUTRITION AND HEALTH IMPACT. (2025). EXPLORING THE SIX DIMENSIONS OF FOOD SECURITY IN NEW JERSEY.

of healthy and liked foods in grocery stores, chronic food stability, and food skills and time. These findings indicate that there are areas within New Jersey that are struggling across these five dimensions to a much greater degree than the state overall. For many in these areas, accessing enough healthy food may be a chronic challenge. According to these findings, some communities may benefit from programs and support to build food purchasing power, increase food options, increase the availability of affordable healthy foods in stores, and build food knowledge and skills. As a whole, looking at the broad statewide sample only, New Jersey scores relatively high for access to food equipment and sanitary spaces to prepare meals, ability to make healthy meals from the food options they have, and many experience a stable food situation (e.g., one without monthly or seasonal cycles). Overall, New Jerseyans in the broad statewide sample score relatively lower for availability of healthy and liked foods at stores, feeling like they can engage in activities and processes that can shape the food system around them (e.g., advocate for healthier foods in schools), and for those who utilize food pantries, many felt there were not healthy or liked foods provided. These scores on the broad statewide sample indicate some areas of strength and opportunities for improvement. These scores can serve as a baseline for measuring future progress across these first five dimensions of food security.

In addition to the sample reviewed above, the following summaries were created for each of the five dimensions measures. These summaries provide key findings identified for sub-group differences ([see Report for data and full analyses](#)).

 **ACCESS:** Households that faced the most difficulty being able to afford enough food and/or running out of food before having money to buy more included current parents/caregivers of children, non-English-speaking participants, households in North and South Jersey, younger respondents, and households with income under \$4,000 per month.

 **AVAILABILITY:** Healthy food availability, quality produce, and preferred options were insufficient in shopping areas and food pantries. Specific groups, including caregivers, non-English speakers, pantry clients, North/South Jersey residents, younger individuals, and low-income households, particularly require support. Food pantries need additional assistance to provide healthier choices like fruits and vegetables.

 **UTILIZATION:** Many households struggled to prepare healthy meals due to inadequate food preparation equipment, storage, and sanitary areas. This included parents/

caregivers, single male-headed households, non-English speakers, food pantry clients, and those in urban areas of North and South Jersey making under \$2,000 per month. Additionally, limited food knowledge, skills, and time compounded these challenges, affecting SNAP users, food pantry clients, and younger households, particularly those earning under \$4,000 per month.

 **STABILITY:** Households experienced food insecurity through monthly and seasonal cycles, particularly affecting current parents/caregivers, younger households, non-English speakers, WIC and SNAP users, food pantry clients, and those with incomes under \$4,000 per month. Chronic food insecurity was notably prevalent among parents/caregivers, non-English speakers, households in North and South Jersey, and those earning under \$2,000 per month.

 **AGENCY:** 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 of the five food security dimensions. Particularly, households with current parents/caregivers of children, non-English-speaking participants, SNAP users, WIC users, food pantry clients, households in North and South Jersey, and younger respondents scored lowest.

## Food System Expert Survey: Results

### DIMENSION: SUSTAINABILITY

The majority of food system expert respondents reported expertise in food security (75.4%), including emergency food, food justice, and health and nutrition assistance programs. There was also well-distributed representation of experts in food production (39.3%), food manufacturing and retail (37.7%), environmental issues (34.4%), and economic development (31.2%). Most respondents were between 31 and 60 years old (77.6%), the majority were White (83.6%), and over half identified as a woman (60.7%). A third of respondents worked statewide (32.8%), and at least four experts from each county took the survey.

To promote a more sustainable food system and ensure adequate food supplies for future generations, 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. Additionally, food system experts recommended promoting living wages within the food system, supporting representativeness among farmers, increasing the number

of farmers markets and grocery retailers in areas with lower availability of healthy foods, promoting farming cooperatives among small and mid-size farms, and assisting farmers to adapt to changing weather patterns and protection from extreme weather events. The five issues (from the 35 reviewed) with the highest priority scores are shown in **Figure 7**.



**FIGURE 7** | Food system expert survey results: Five highest priority issues to address in New Jersey (n=61)

### WHICH SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES ARE HIGHEST PRIORITY TO ADDRESS IN NJ?

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

93% AGREED

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

85% AGREED

Supporting underrepresented farmers is a high priority issue.

78% AGREED

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

77% AGREED

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

77% AGREED

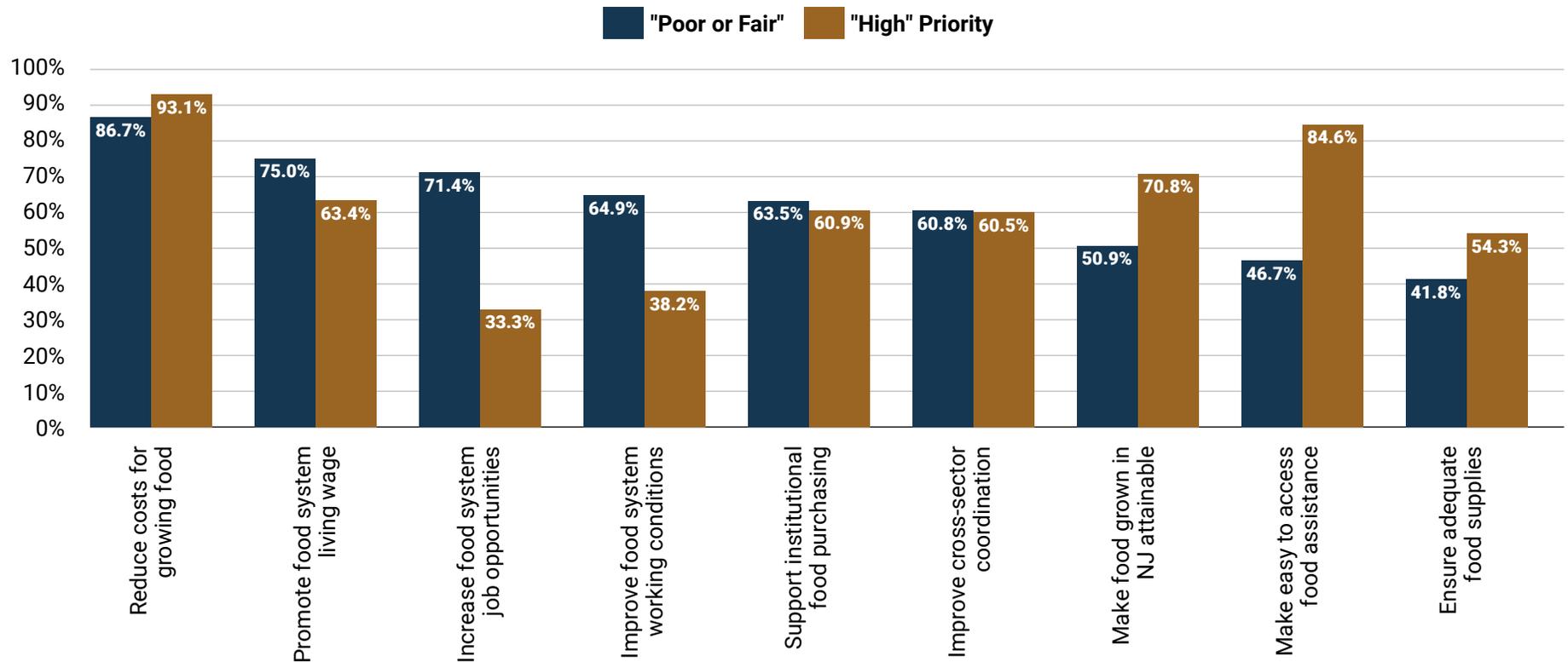
SOURCE: CENTER FOR NUTRITION AND HEALTH IMPACT. (2025). EXPLORING THE SIX DIMENSIONS OF FOOD SECURITY IN NEW JERSEY.

**Figure 8** shows a sample of findings related to sustainability issues within the Nutrition Security and Food Affordability category. Experts in nutrition security and food affordability noted that New Jersey effectively ensures food supplies through food banks and nonprofits.

The state moderately facilitates access to nutrition assistance programs, yet systemic issues persist. One expert highlighted that while emergency food support is adequate, addressing underlying food system problems is more complex. Recent sociopolitical

changes could challenge access to assistance further. There is consensus among experts on the need to reduce production costs for farmers, promote living wages, and increase employment opportunities across the food system.

**FIGURE 8** | Food system expert survey results: Nutrition security and food affordability: Percent responding “Poor or Fair” & identifying “high” priority issues (n=61)



SOURCE: CENTER FOR NUTRITION AND HEALTH IMPACT. (2025). EXPLORING THE SIX DIMENSIONS OF FOOD SECURITY IN NEW JERSEY.

# Strategic Plan Development Process

The development of this Strategic Plan was grounded in a rigorous, inclusive, and evidence-driven process designed to reflect the realities, priorities, and strengths of New Jersey's diverse food system. Drawing on the Six Dimensions of Food Security as a unifying framework, the process combined statewide data analysis, community perspectives, expert input, and extensive cross-sector collaboration to build a comprehensive understanding of the conditions shaping food security across the state.

Through surveys, facilitated discussions, partner engagement, and iterative refinement with agency and community partners, OFSA developed a set of strategies that are both actionable and system-aligned. This process ensured that the final plan is not only rooted in rich evidence but also responsive to the lived and living experiences of residents and the operational realities of organizations working throughout New Jersey's food system. OFSA and partners prioritized transparency and community leadership throughout the process. The following section reviews the information sources and steps of the process from beginning to end, including a broad timeline in **Figure 9**.

## Evidence Base

The development process incorporated the following information sources:

### QUANTITATIVE

- ▶ Analysis of more than 2,000 responses collected through a statewide and resident-based survey designed around the dimensions of food security
- ▶ Expert survey of 61 multi-sector food system leaders assessing sustainability priorities and system performance
- ▶ Review of statewide and national datasets on food insecurity, demographics, and social determinants of health, included in [The State of Food Security in New Jersey: A Data Chart Book](#) and OFSA's [Public Data Catalog](#).

### QUALITATIVE

- ▶ Analyses of 22 existing and relevant reports, assessments, and plans
- ▶ Convenings and listening sessions with charitable food providers, state agencies, agriculture partners, healthcare systems, philanthropic partners, and educators (n=20)
- ▶ Public comment survey and statewide feedback period on the draft plan (n=133)

## Community Building Groundwork

From the outset, OFSA prioritized community building as a core part of the planning process. Before identifying priorities, we focused on building trust, shared understanding, and alignment across sectors (including sectors detailed in **Figure 5**). Through listening sessions, cross-sector roundtables, and ongoing dialogue, partners from agriculture, health, education, philanthropy, charitable food, and community development helped shape a common language and framework for food security rooted in six interrelated dimensions: availability, access, utilization, stability, agency, and sustainability.

These convenings strengthened relationships and momentum statewide. They also created opportunities for community-based organizations and residents with lived and living expertise to meaningfully shape the direction of the plan. This foundation of collaboration ensured that the final plan reflects shared ownership and a commitment to collective action.

## Development Steps

### 1. RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE REVIEW

To establish a strong evidence base, OFSA and partners conducted a comprehensive review of more than twenty existing reports, including municipal and regional food assessments, state-level policy blueprints, and recent environmental and public health plans. **Appendix 2** lists the existing landscape and recommendation reports analyzed to inform the development of initial iterations of the Strategic Plan with select characteristics of the reports noted. This review was completed not only to ensure a multi-sector lens but also to acknowledge and build upon past and current recommendations/efforts in the state.

Complementing this literature review, CNHI conducted an original analysis of food security across New Jersey using the Six Dimensions of Food Security Framework ([see the Exploring the Six Dimensions of Food Security in New Jersey Report section above](#)). These data helped identify both statewide trends and local variances. The synthesis of existing research and new analysis ensured that the Strategic Plan builds upon the significant learnings and work already underway in New Jersey's food system. Evidence was triangulated across existing

assessments, practitioner expertise, academic literature, and community perspectives to ensure strategies are grounded in both practice-based and scientific knowledge.

### 2. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AND EXPERT INPUT

A multidisciplinary [Executive Committee](#), selected by OFSA, representing State agencies, community-based organizations, and sectors across agriculture, philanthropy, charitable food organizations, healthcare, and higher education guided the Strategic Plan's development. This committee met regularly in 2025 to assess data, identify priority focus areas, and refine strategies. Members also participated in working groups to draft content across the Strategic Plan's focus areas and completed surveys that helped refine and prioritize strategies and align them with current initiatives and funding opportunities. This iterative feedback ensured the Strategic Plan's focus areas and strategies are both ambitious and achievable.

### 3. COMMUNITY FEEDBACK AND RESIDENT PERSPECTIVES

Resident input played a critical role throughout the Strategic Plan development process. OFSA integrated findings from statewide community

conversations, storytelling initiatives, and survey feedback. Virtual and in-person convenings allowed partners and residents to respond to ideas, share lived and living expertise, and identify gaps in proposed approaches. These engagements helped balance expert analysis with everyday realities and ensured that the final plan authentically reflects the varied experiences of New Jersey's communities.

In summer 2025, OFSA released an [overview of the draft Strategic Plan](#) and invited statewide community feedback via survey (n =133). Input from these efforts directly informed the selection, refinement, and structure of focus areas and strategies in this final Strategic Plan. The outcome is a Strategic Plan that is research-informed and community-driven. The plan is designed to evolve as new data and insights emerge.

### 4. POST-STRATEGIC PLAN LAUNCH IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS

To support implementation of the Strategic Plan, OFSA is releasing an accompanying Implementation Toolkit in early 2026. This resource will serve as a bridge from the "what and why" defined in the Strategic Plan to the "how and who" of work in action (see **Figure 4**).



# Focus Areas and Strategies

Having outlined the purpose, process, and Framework guiding this work, the following section represents the Strategic Plan itself that emerged from extensive community input, data analysis, and cross-sector collaboration. These are the core leverage points through which New Jersey can advance food security for everyone across the state.

This section describes the Strategic Plan's five Focus Areas, details their accompanying Strategies, and provides model examples for select Strategies. The [joint display table](#) at the end of this section summarizes each strategy's ties to the Six Dimensions of Food Security Framework, the *Exploring the Six Dimensions Report* data, and implications for New Jersey.

## Each Focus Area's description contains:

- ▶ Summary list of Strategies
- ▶ Overview of the Focus Area itself
- ▶ Gaps and needs justifying the Focus Area
- ▶ Anticipated impact by relevant food security dimensions<sup>18</sup>
- ▶ Sectors likely involved in implementation
- ▶ Intended outcomes



# 01 FOCUS AREA 1

## Enhance Information Exchange and Access to Improve Public Awareness, Optimize Programs, and Support Data-Driven Decision-Making

### 1.1 DATA COORDINATION

Coordinate state agencies across sectors to make existing food security-related data available across programs, voluntarily and where possible.

### 1.2 IMPACT ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH

Conduct analyses on the health and economic impacts of food insecurity and research the effectiveness and cost-benefit of food security initiatives and policies.

### 1.3 DATA VISUALIZATION AND DISSEMINATION

Invest in coordinated, intuitive, asset-based data dashboards and visualization tools that can be customized to support community initiatives.

Both qualitative (e.g., stories) and quantitative (e.g., numbers) data play a critical role in shaping a shared understanding of food insecurity, its contributing factors and resulting impacts, and the initiatives that aim to address it. This Focus Area promotes data infrastructure and advances a coordinated, data-informed approach to food security by strengthening how information is collected, shared, visualized, and applied across sectors. It promotes coordination among agencies and supports the development of community-facing data tools with localized analyses that illustrate the economic, health, and lived impacts of food insecurity in New Jersey.

This focus area strengthens the foundation upon which all Strategic Plan strategies rest. It allows for more responsive, appropriately tailored programs and policies, strengthens progress measurement, supports the diagnosis of root causes and monitoring of disparities, and enhances advocacy efforts. Additionally, increased

collaboration among data collectors, such as state and local agencies, program operators, and academic institutions, may support more efficient stewardship of research resources and reduce participant burden and duplication of efforts. Making data accessible through collaboration, while respecting data security, confidentiality, and community ownership, helps validate lived experience, elevate community knowledge, and establish a common language among food security partners.

In New Jersey, there is a demonstrated need for improved data sharing and coordination while still retaining data confidentiality and client privacy. While many agencies and partners collect data related to food security, along with economic hardship and public health indicators, these datasets may be siloed, underutilized, and/or inaccessible to decision-makers. This fragmentation hinders various food security partners across the state and their ability to respond proactively to emerging trends or to identify who

is most impacted and why. As reflected in the *Exploring the Six Dimensions Report* statewide findings, fragmentation in data systems and limited cross-sector information sharing constrains the state’s ability to fully understand food insecurity patterns, identify who is most impacted, and respond proactively to emerging needs.

This focus area advances the **Stability** dimension by enabling earlier identification of shocks and trends; reinforces **Agency** through transparent, community-facing data; and contributes to long-term **Sustainability** by grounding policy and resource decisions in high-quality evidence.

**Key sectors that may be involved in implementing this focus area include:** state and local government (particularly Departments of Health, Human Services, Agriculture, and Education), healthcare systems, academic institutions, advocacy organizations, and community-based nonprofits. These sectors both produce and benefit from improved data capacity, and their authentic collaboration is essential for sustained systems change.



**INTENDED OUTCOMES FROM IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIES WITHIN THIS FOCUS AREA INCLUDE:**

- ▶ Increased cross-sector engagement and alignment, leading to more efficient and effective program coordination and resource allocation.<sup>19</sup>
- ▶ Improved understanding of the six dimensions of food security across New Jersey and development of shared measures, facilitating greater ability to identify geographic and demographic disparities in food security, track progress, and tailor interventions across a dynamic spectrum of needs.<sup>20</sup>
- ▶ Enhanced understanding of the health and economic costs of food insecurity, which can drive public and private investments in prevention strategies.<sup>21</sup>
- ▶ Greater community engagement and agency through accessible data and storytelling tools.

## FOCUS AREA 1 | STRATEGY 1

## Data Coordination

**Coordinate state agencies across sectors to make existing food security–related data available across programs, voluntarily and where possible.**

This strategy supports the development of a voluntary, coordinated, cross-agency/organization data infrastructure to improve data collection, tracking, analysis, and program responsiveness. By aligning definitions of terms and measures, establishing formal data-sharing agreements, and developing common indicators of food security across state programs (e.g., SNAP, WIC, Medicaid, education, childcare, employment, charitable food, family services, and housing), New Jersey can improve its ability to identify food insecurity trends and related factors, which can be useful to inform real-time decision-making. An interagency governance framework and accompanying shared data inventory can help agencies work together as peers, co-developing an understanding of who is being served, where gaps exist, and how systems can operate more efficiently together toward shared, positive outcomes. Enhance transparency by sharing data collection methods and providing de-identified, aggregate data publicly while preserving individual data privacy.

### MODEL EXAMPLE

#### COORDINATING SNAP AND WIC DATA

The Coordinating SNAP and Nutrition Supports (CSNS) project in New Jersey exemplifies how state agencies can work to make data available and actionable across programs. Through a collaborative effort between the New Jersey Department of Human Services, the Division of Family Development (administering SNAP), and the New Jersey Department of Health (administering WIC), New Jersey developed a shared data infrastructure to identify eligible but unenrolled participants and streamline access to benefits.

#### Key components of the CSNS project included:

- ▶ **A web application programming interface (API)** that enables real-time data exchange between SNAP and WIC eligibility systems, allowing WIC staff to confirm SNAP participation and determine adjunctive eligibility and outreach for a likely eligible WIC non-participant based on their receipt of SNAP.

- ▶ **The New Jersey Nutritional Data Hub**, a centralized, secure data warehouse that houses participation records from both programs and supports continuous data matching.
- ▶ **Targeted outreach efforts** driven by matched data, enabling the state to send personalized notices to individuals likely eligible for but not enrolled in WIC or SNAP.

As a result, more than 22,000 individuals were enrolled in WIC and 71,000 were enrolled in SNAP following targeted outreach. This coordinated data-sharing approach not only improved cross enrollment of SNAP and WIC but also fostered a sustainable, scalable model for integrating additional benefit programs like Medicaid and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). The CSNS project demonstrates the power of cross-agency data infrastructure to increase access to benefits and support continuous improvement through shared accountability.

FOCUS AREA 1 | STRATEGY 2

## Impact Analysis and Research

**Conduct analyses on the health and economic impacts of food insecurity and research the effectiveness and cost-benefit of food security initiatives and policies.**

Quantifying the impacts of food insecurity, especially on health and healthcare costs, educational, developmental, and economic outcomes, and across all life stages, can provide crucial information to help drive investment

and policy change. This strategy promotes partnerships with researchers, healthcare systems, and public agencies to estimate the costs of food insecurity and the return on investment in addressing it. An example that includes evaluating the impacts associated with food is medicine programs (e.g., produce prescriptions, medically tailored groceries). Findings should be translated into plain language and used to inform program design, public awareness, and advocacy.



**MODEL EXAMPLE**

### NEW JERSEY FOOD SYSTEM DASHBOARD

Launched in June 2024, the [New Jersey Food System Dashboard](#) provides publicly available information on different aspects of New Jersey’s food system. It was developed with a grant to the [Rutgers Cooperative Extension Department of Family & Community Health Sciences](#). Data is available at the state, county, and municipality levels.

The Dashboard includes metrics on food/nutrition security, agriculture and land use, the food system economy (e.g., food system sales, employment, and wages), and climate factors resulting from and impacting food production (e.g., greenhouse gas emissions and temperatures). Community leaders in New Brunswick, Camden, and Newark contributed to its content and design with leadership and collaboration from [New Jersey Food Democracy Collaborative](#).

FOCUS AREA 1 | STRATEGY 3

## Data Visualization and Dissemination

**Invest in coordinated, intuitive, asset-based data dashboards and visualization tools that can be customized to support community initiatives.**

Community-facing dashboards can be developed through an optional opt-in model with data from state agencies (and other entities with access

to relevant data), supporting data transparency and accountability. These tools can make data actionable by translating complex information into visually appealing, accessible tools that provide information for data-driven and effective program planning, policy advocacy, and funding applications, while protecting individual privacy and data confidentiality. This strategy supports

investment in a shared, multi-sector, interactive dashboard that maps food insecurity trends, highlights community assets, and integrates program data from multiple sectors. Tools can be co-designed with community-based organizations to ensure usability and relevance and paired with training or mini-grants to support local implementation when possible.

### MODEL EXAMPLE

#### NEW JERSEY CHILD WELFARE DATA HUB

The [New Jersey Child Welfare Data Hub](#) is a leading example of how a centralized, asset-based data dashboard can support community-driven initiatives and strengthen systems coordination. Developed through a collaboration between the [New Jersey Department of Children and Families](#) and the Institute for Families at the [Rutgers University School of Social Work](#), the Data Hub facilitates communities' access to key indicators of child well-being and family contexts at the state and county levels.

#### Key features of the Data Hub include:

- ▶ **Customizable Visualization Tools:** Users can explore measures of child well-being, including child behavioral health, disability data, and program utilization data, alongside social and economic contextual information

like population under 18 and under 5, children in poverty, and rates of being uninsured or unemployed. The dashboard is interactive, enabling users to tailor views to local needs and contexts.

- ▶ **Geographic Contextualization:** The Data Map tool allows users to explore indicators at the state and county level, offering insight into the environments and conditions in which children and families live. This supports place-based planning and helps communities understand the broader factors that influence child welfare.
- ▶ **Support for Community Action:** By making data accessible and easy to interpret, the Data Hub supports users to identify trends, surface community strengths, and focus resources where they are most needed. It also facilitates cross-sector collaboration by providing a shared evidence base.



# 02

## FOCUS AREA 2

### Expand Community-Based Food Infrastructure and Market Channel Creation for Enhanced Ongoing Food Access, Utilization, and Availability

#### 2.1 FOOD ACCESS AND AVAILABILITY INFRASTRUCTURE

Increase investment in transportation, technology, and infrastructure improvements to increase availability and access to food across the food supply chain and access to food/nutrition programs.

#### 2.2 AGRICULTURE WORKFORCE AND LAND ACCESS

Promote community-centered approaches that support the agricultural workforce and increase access to land for food production.

#### 2.3 MARKET CHANNEL CREATION

Leverage federal, state, institutional, and charitable food purchasing dollars to support farmers and regional supply chains, expand local procurement opportunities, and build long-term demand for a variety of New Jersey-grown foods.

#### 2.4 FOOD ENTERPRISE INVESTMENT

Invest in community-rooted food enterprises and infrastructure to strengthen appropriate and preferred food utilization and economic opportunity.

New Jersey's food system, from small-scale to large-scale producers (e.g., farmers, ranchers, fishers, and other growers) capable of serving multiple regions, holds tremendous potential to improve food access and availability, while promoting economic stability, especially through investments in local food infrastructure and market channel development. This focus area aims to build a more inclusive, regionally grounded food economy. It centers on strengthening the physical and economic systems that support the movement of adequate food from producers to communities, while ensuring that communities have the purchasing power necessary to pay food producers fair, sustainable prices for their products. This focus area emphasizes locally tailored, community-rooted solutions and supports infrastructure across the food supply chain that improves community food access. It promotes investments in shared infrastructure like food hubs, community gardens, urban farms, and local market channels and emphasizes that these investments are amplified when

leveraging the purchasing power of institutional procurement and public programs. As a result, communities gain improved food access, stronger local economies, and greater agency over their food environments.

Many communities across New Jersey experience limited access to local foods that meet their family's needs. According to the Reinvestment Fund's 2023 [Limited Supermarket Access Analysis](#), significant areas of New Jersey have inadequate healthy, local food retail. While there is growing interest in local food production (from urban farms to farmers markets), many community-based growers and food entrepreneurs face barriers such as lack of land access, limited capital and support, and volatile demand.<sup>22</sup> When local infrastructure is under-resourced or fragmented, small-scale producers struggle to reach markets, and subsequently community members lack access to affordable fresh food. A lack of local infrastructure also negatively affects small-scale, larger scale, and regional

producers. Volatility in pricing and markets is common for all New Jersey food producers. Examples of this include price fluctuation for fish or produce. When such fluctuations happen, food producers are left scrambling for buyers. This is a result of a lack of smarter, local infrastructure that can provide a direct line of sight between New Jersey's food supply and the demand and buying potential for that supply. Data from the *Exploring the Six Dimensions Report* also highlight persistent shortcomings in availability, access, and utilization across New Jersey, with low availability scores and pronounced disparities for caregivers, multilingual households, and residents with low income. These gaps point not to insufficient food supply, but to gaps and inefficiencies in infrastructure, distribution, and market connectivity that limit the movement

of appropriate and culturally relevant food into communities.

By supporting farmers, expanding local infrastructure, investing in community-rooted food enterprises, and developing equitable market channels, these strategies directly improve **Availability** and **Access** while also enabling communities to better **Utilize** appropriate foods. Investments in regional production, aggregation, storage, and distribution also strengthen **Stability**, reducing vulnerability to supply chain disruptions, economic volatility, and climate shocks. Strategically, this focus area advances **Agency** and long-term **Sustainability** by supporting equitable farmer participation, expanding market opportunities for underrepresented producers, and reinforcing a resilient local food economy.

**Sectors likely to be involved in implementing this focus area include:** food producers, agriculture and economic development agencies, community development financial institutions (CDFIs), local and regional food coalitions, municipal governments, planning and zoning boards, school districts, healthcare and higher education institutions, retailers (including supermarkets, farmers markets, corner stores, farm stands), and community organizations focused on improving land and/or food access. Their collective action can help catalyze a stronger food value chain that works for both producers and communities.



### INTENDED OUTCOMES FROM IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIES WITHIN THIS FOCUS AREA INCLUDE:

- ▶ Increased availability and geographic access to fresh, locally produced foods.<sup>23, 24, 25</sup>
- ▶ Expanded economic opportunities for farmers, food entrepreneurs, and food workers.<sup>26, 27</sup>
- ▶ Strengthened local supply chains and reduced dependency on external food systems.<sup>23</sup>
- ▶ Greater land access and ownership opportunities for food-producing communities.<sup>28</sup>
- ▶ Stronger integration between food production, distribution, and public nutrition programs.
- ▶ Improved community health.<sup>29</sup>

FOCUS AREA 2 | STRATEGY 1

## Food Access and Availability Infrastructure

**Increase investment in transportation, technology, and infrastructure improvements to increase availability and access to food across the food supply chain and access to food/nutrition programs.**

A key barrier to accessing adequate food is the lack of reliable, affordable, and timely

transportation. This strategy focuses on improving the physical and technological infrastructure and mobility systems that bi-directionally connect communities to appropriate and preferred foods. Examples include supporting online ordering and grocery delivery, funding shuttle services from senior centers to food pantries (or co-locating a food pantry at a senior center), centralizing pricing

information, supporting municipal transit stops near farmers markets or social service agencies, incentivizing grocery retailers to open in areas without an existing retailer through infrastructure tax credits, or co-locating local food with food benefit (e.g., WIC, SNAP) services. In rural areas, investments might include shared cold storage or cooperative delivery models.

### MODEL EXAMPLE

#### VIRTUA HEALTH'S EAT WELL PROGRAMS – A SYSTEMWIDE FOOD IS MEDICINE APPROACH

Virtua Health, a nonprofit health system in South Jersey, is addressing food insecurity through its innovative Eat Well program. Since 2017, Eat Well has served as a trusted source of affordable, nutritious food, offering a suite of food-is-medicine initiatives that position nutrition as a foundation of health. These efforts, including the Eat Well Mobile Farmers Market, Mobile Grocery Store, and Food Farmacy, aim to create reliable access to nourishing food and strengthen the wellbeing of individuals, families, and entire communities. By combining patient screening, deeply discounted mobile markets, nutrition education, and strong community partnerships, Virtua treats food insecurity not only as a social need but also as a clinical priority. Eat Well's

flagship initiative, the Mobile Farmers Market, operates year-round to provide fresh, seasonal, and local produce at significantly reduced prices while empowering community members through education. Its sister program, the Mobile Grocery Store, is a one-aisle grocery store on wheels that brings affordable produce, proteins, dairy, household staples, and more directly to neighborhoods in Camden and Burlington counties. In parallel, Virtua's Food Farmacy provides patients with free, medically tailored groceries alongside personalized nutrition counseling. Supported by private foundations and public grants, the Eat Well program continues to expand and serve as a replicable model for health systems across New Jersey.



## FOCUS AREA 2 | STRATEGY 2

## Agriculture Workforce and Land Access

**Promote community-centered approaches that support the agricultural workforce and increase access to land for nutritious food production.**

Access to land and a strong agricultural workforce are essential for promoting food security, yet both remain out of reach for many aspiring and current producers. This strategy supports policies and programs that expand secure, affordable access to land for growing food through tools like public land leasing, zoning reform, shared-use land models, and municipal support for community-based production. Another avenue is through investment in agricultural workforce development through training pipelines, mentorship programs, and succession planning to help new and emerging farmers build skills, access markets, and transition into long-term food production roles. To further support urban and small-scale growers, the strategy calls for the creation of a clear state definition for small-plot and urban-plot food production, which can guide policy development and ensure these producers are recognized and resourced appropriately.

### MODEL EXAMPLE

#### CONNECTING FOOD SYSTEMS TO FOOD SECURITY THROUGH VALUE-ADDED PROCESSING: PATHWAYS FOR FARMERS

The [Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Jersey](#) (NOFA-NJ) sits at the nexus of food systems and food security and centers small-scale farms and local producers within the New Jersey Foodshed. NOFA-NJ's [Land Link](#) program connects aspiring farmers with landowners open to leasing or selling farmland, helping to overcome the high land costs and development pressures that limit secure tenure in New Jersey.

Related to additional strategies in this Focus Area, NOFA-NJ also [promotes value-added processing](#) as a strategy to boost farm viability. Through technical assistance, the organization supports farmers in creating products like sauces, jams, and fermented goods that extend shelf life, increase revenue, and expand markets. Value-added production not only bolsters farm-based businesses but also creates broader economic pathways for

New Jersey communities by strengthening local identities, protecting scenic byways, creating agripreneurship opportunities, and localizing food distribution. Over 190 local New Jersey value-added producers were recently identified through a Rutgers University undergraduate research project. [Scotland's Good Food Nation Act \(2022\)](#) provides a legislative framework and governance model at the sub-national level for creating fairer, more equitable food systems.

While value-added producers are not typically seen as direct solutions to food insecurity, they have the potential to play an important role in strengthening local food systems, diversifying food access points, and supporting regional agricultural economies. Their contribution to food security depends on factors like product affordability, distribution, and accessibility, especially in underserved communities.

## FOCUS AREA 2 | STRATEGY 3

## Market Channel Creation

**Leverage federal, state, institutional, and charitable food purchasing dollars to support farmers and regional supply chains, expand local procurement opportunities, and build long-term demand for a variety of New Jersey-grown foods.**

This strategy focuses on building sustained demand for locally grown food by ensuring farmers have consistent, fair-market channels. Market channels can refer to any method of selling food including direct-to-consumer models (e.g., farmers markets, mobile markets, farm stands, Community Supported Agriculture [CSA] programs, community kitchens, agritourism), wholesale markets (e.g., government and private institutions, aggregation centers or hubs). Examples include prioritizing New Jersey-grown food in state agency procurement, expanding the use of USDA programs like the [Local Agriculture Market Program \(LAMP\)](#), [WIC cash-value-benefit](#), and [WIC](#) and [Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program](#), and supporting institutions to adopt “good food purchasing” policies. Emphasis should be placed on supporting small producers and producers who have historically been excluded from institutional markets.

### MODEL EXAMPLE

#### THE PHILLIPSBURG FRESH STOP MARKET & NEW JERSEY'S COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

The [Phillipsburg Fresh Stop Market](#) is an in-person marketplace open to the public three days a week. The market offers a vibrant selection of fresh, locally grown produce, bread, dairy, shelf-stable goods, and local meats. The market was launched by [NORWESCAP](#) and co-developed in collaboration with [New Roots, Communities Revolutionizing Open Public Spaces \(C.R.O.P.S.\)](#), the [Foodshed Alliance](#), and supported by the [New Jersey Office of the Food Security Advocate \(OFSA\)](#). This permanent retail location is powered by New Roots' Fresh Stop Market mobile app platform, which allows shoppers to sign up and pay online using SNAP/EBT or credit/debit card. The initiative provides sliding-scale pricing for shoppers to access fresh, locally sourced produce while strengthening relationships with regional farms and reinvesting in the local food economy. With the Foodshed Alliance facilitating farm partnerships,

and C.R.O.P.S. in Atlantic City serving as a parallel pilot site, the model is part of a broader learning network designed to test a scalable, community-driven approach supported by the shared mobile app technology investment. New Roots also engages local food producers and community partners to create buy-in and consensus for local food, healthy eating, and community building. The Fresh Stop Market app was active for 10 years in Kentucky before being deployed in New Jersey. Early support from OFSA helped bring together key partners, align strategies, and lay the groundwork for long-term efforts to address food insecurity and build more collaborative local food systems across New Jersey. This approach is an emerging model for advancing food security, community health, new market channels, and local economic opportunity.

FOCUS AREA 2 | STRATEGY 4

## Food Enterprise Investment

**Invest in community-rooted food enterprises and infrastructure to strengthen appropriate and preferred food utilization and economic opportunity.**

This strategy supports the creation and expansion of local food infrastructure that is owned, operated, or co-governed by community partners. Resources can support storage units, food transportation, logistics support, aggregation facilities, community

kitchens, urban agriculture, socially responsible food hubs, processing facilities, community gardens, farm-to-institution initiatives, food lockers/self-serv kiosks, job training, and incubator programs for new food businesses. These investments not only improve local distribution efficiency but also can create jobs and foster entrepreneurship in communities that may otherwise have limited economic mobility opportunities.



### MODEL EXAMPLE

#### MOBILE MARKETS AND PANTRIES IN NEW JERSEY

Mobile markets and mobile pantries provide innovative infrastructure solutions that help overcome transportation and geographic barriers to healthy food availability. In New Jersey, several community-led models are demonstrating success. [AtlantiCare's Community Mobile Market](#), a full-service grocery store on wheels, travels to Atlantic City and surrounding communities to sell fresh produce and grocery staples at affordable prices. In northern New Jersey, [City Green's](#)

[Veggie Mobile](#), a custom-designed refrigerated box truck, brings locally grown produce directly to neighborhoods where fresh produce might otherwise be inaccessible. Likewise, [The Green Bean](#), MEND's school-bus-turned-mobile-food-pantry, brings free fresh produce and pantry staples to community partners across Essex County. In addition to supporting the availability of food, each of these mobile markets expands food access by either offering food at no- or low-cost, accepting SNAP EBT, and/or accepting

other food benefits like WIC and Nutrition Incentives, such as [City Green's Good Food Bucks](#). Mobile pantries prioritize dignity and agency by creating a welcoming market-like environment to select items, such as fresh fruits and vegetables. These programs show how investments in mobile transportation infrastructure can increase food access, support federal nutrition program participation, and foster community connection across a variety of settings.

# 03

## FOCUS AREA 3

### Build and Support Local Partnerships to Advance Community-Driven Food Security Approaches

#### 3.1 TAILORED EDUCATION, OUTREACH, AND AWARENESS EFFORTS

Launch new, and support existing, community-informed education, outreach, and awareness efforts to increase participation in local food security programs and build trust and partnerships with populations with lived and living experiences of food insecurity.

#### 3.2 COUNTY-LEVEL COORDINATION

Support action-oriented local food coalitions through county-level coordination that brings together partners across sectors to align food security efforts, develop and implement localized strategies, and share funding opportunities.

#### 3.3 BI-DIRECTIONAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Establish consistent bi-directional community engagement strategies that feed into strengthening coordination between local and state food coalitions to inform decision-making and support implementation of long-term innovative and scalable food security strategies.

#### 3.4 SCREENING AND REFERRALS

Provide cross-sector data integration, resources, technical assistance, and training to organizations on screening for program eligibility/need and providing closed-loop referrals to services.

#### 3.5 MULTI-BENEFIT HUBS

Establish multi-benefit hubs of various sizes, scales, and modalities to streamline enrollment and access to appropriate food and other social services.

Local partnerships are essential to building food security efforts that are responsive, effective, and sustainable. When communities lead food security efforts guided by trust, local relevance, and lived expertise, the resulting solutions are more likely to reach those most impacted and generate long-term systems change. This focus area recognizes that no single program or agency can meet the complex challenge of food insecurity alone. It promotes building and investing in shared governance structures, county and local food networks, and technical support for less-resourced partners. It builds on the momentum of existing coalitions, encourages cross-sector alignment, and centers community voice in decision-making. It also lays the groundwork for institutional partners like state agencies, philanthropy, and local governments to act as supporters of community-driven action, not sole drivers of it.

While many important community-driven initiatives exist and demonstrate incredible work across

the state, these approaches are often operated independently and are generally under-supported and under-utilized. Many of the organizations most trusted by residents face persistent barriers to sustainable funding, technical assistance, and inclusion in policy decisions. County-based food coalitions exist in some areas in the state but vary widely in structure, capacity, purpose, and influence. Smaller organizations often serve on the front lines of food access without formal recognition or state-supported pathways to engage in broader planning efforts. Analysis in the *Exploring the Six Dimensions Report* shows that agency (i.e., the ability to make choices, shape one's food environment, and participate in food system decision-making) is the lowest-scoring dimension across New Jersey residents. Barriers to access and utilization were also disproportionately high among SNAP/WIC households, multilingual residents, younger adults, and caregivers. These patterns underscore the critical role of trusted community organizations, local coalitions, and place-based

partnerships in reaching residents most impacted by food insecurity.

This focus area strengthens the local ecosystems that make state-level strategies meaningful on the ground. By elevating community leadership, expanding culturally relevant outreach, strengthening county-level coordination, and

investing in screening and referral pathways, the strategies within this focus area improve **Access, Utilization, and Agency** simultaneously. They also contribute to **Stability**, as coordinated local networks are better positioned to respond quickly to emerging needs, reduce duplication, and ensure continuous support across the social service landscape.

**Key sectors involved in implementing this focus area include:** local food coalitions (i.e., councils, collaboratives, task forces), municipal and county governments, community-based organizations, faith-based institutions, charitable food organizations, the healthcare and corporate sectors, philanthropic funders, and advocacy networks. Their intentional collaboration is essential to co-create solutions that reflect community needs, address systemic barriers, and align with long-term communal goals.



### INTENDED OUTCOMES FROM IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIES WITHIN THIS FOCUS AREA INCLUDE:

- ▶ Greater trust and engagement from communities most impacted by food security initiatives.<sup>30</sup>
- ▶ Increased visibility and influence of people with lived and living experiences of food insecurity and community organizations in local and state decision-making.<sup>31</sup>
- ▶ More coordinated service delivery and resource sharing (monetary and otherwise) at the county level.<sup>32</sup>
- ▶ Enhanced capacity of local food coalitions to implement and monitor food security strategies, including systemic and policy changes.<sup>33, 34, 35</sup>
- ▶ Reduced duplication of efforts and improved reach of food security programs.

FOCUS AREA 3 | STRATEGY 1

## Tailored Education, Outreach, and Awareness Efforts

**Launch new, and support existing, community-informed education, outreach, and awareness efforts to increase participation in local food security programs and build trust and partnerships with populations with lived and living experiences of food insecurity.**

This strategy supports the design and delivery of locally tailored outreach efforts that reflect the needs and concerns of communities most impacted by food insecurity. Outreach efforts should be co-created with trusted messengers and embedded in familiar community settings, such as faith centers, civic organizations, childcare providers, healthcare providers, schools and local libraries, and may include online communication channels. Efforts

should not only promote awareness of available programs but also address fears or misconceptions that may prevent engagement, such as concerns about eligibility, stigma, or data privacy.

FOCUS AREA 3 | STRATEGY 2

## County-level Coordination

**Support action-oriented local food coalitions through county-level coordination that brings together partners across sectors to align food security efforts, develop and implement localized strategies, and share funding opportunities.**

This strategy promotes the growth and sustainability of county- and local-level food coalitions that facilitate collaboration among county governments, nonprofits, faith-based organizations, and residents. These entities



serve as conveners of local knowledge and planning, helping communities identify gaps and duplications in services, define their food security tactics, drive implementation, monitor progress, and advocate for systemic change. This strategy includes support for participatory decision-making models that meaningfully incorporate resident voices, such as compensated advisory boards or community-led planning forums. This strategy can also include prioritization of grant funding and technical assistance for community organizations that may not have historically accessed public funding. This includes simplifying grant applications, offering technical support during the application process, providing general operating support, and prioritizing funding for organizations that historically have been excluded from traditional philanthropic or government grants.

**MODEL EXAMPLE**

### THE SNAP GAP DUAL-ENROLLMENT PILOT PROJECT BY RUTGERS COOPERATIVE EXTENSION AND THE NEW JERSEY OFFICE OF THE FOOD SECURITY ADVOCATE

The SNAP Gap Dual-Enrollment Pilot Project focuses on engaging families and partners in schools to identify gaps in knowledge and understanding of both school meals and other food security programs, such as SNAP, that a family may qualify for if they already qualify for free school meals. As a part of this project, the Rutgers team created tailored outreach within specific schools based on feedback from students and families. For example, in the Paterson School District, students filmed innovative videos describing food security programs and school meals from their perspective. These videos were then shared with community outreach partners and potentially eligible families.

FOCUS AREA 3 | STRATEGY 3

## Bi-directional Community Engagement

**Establish consistent bi-directional community engagement mechanisms that feed into strengthening coordination between local and state food coalitions to inform decision-making and support implementation of long-term innovative and scalable food security strategies.**

To support effective and sustained food security efforts, this strategy includes the creation of routine engagement mechanisms and the strengthening of coordination between state and local food coalitions. Together, these efforts ensure that community voice is embedded in program and policy decision-making at all levels. This strategy promotes regular, structured opportunities for communities and coalitions to share bi-directional updates, provide feedback, identify challenges, and co-design solutions. Examples include statewide and local convenings, shared learning sessions, advisory councils, digital platforms for idea exchange, surveys, and focus groups. Strengthening feedback loops and shared priorities across levels of government and community coalitions reinforces strategic alignment, prevents duplication, and enables scaling local innovations statewide. Ultimately,

this strategy positions residents, community-based organizations, and local coalitions as leaders in a coordinated system where state-level planning is informed by community knowledge,

and where effective solutions can be replicated and celebrated statewide, furthering the state's position nationally as a recognized leader in promoting food security.

### MODEL EXAMPLE

#### BERGEN COUNTY FOOD SECURITY TASK FORCE – EVOLVING TO MEET FOOD SECURITY NEEDS FROM PANDEMIC RESPONSE TO EVERYDAY RESOURCE CONNECTION & SUPPORT

Founded in 2020, the Bergen County Food Security Task Force began as a rapid response to the ballooning levels of food insecurity during the COVID pandemic, bringing together a countywide coalition of charitable food providers, county agencies including the Bergen County Department of Human Services and Board of Social Services, hospitals and healthcare systems, school districts, municipalities, and various nonprofits and direct service providers. After the immediate COVID-19 pandemic emergency stabilized, task force efforts shifted to identifying strategies and practices to make the network of charitable food providers more resilient and connected, helping to ensure that food pantry guests had access to information and resources that would help them on the path to true food security. The Food Security Task

Force was eventually made permanent as the Bergen County Office of Food Security (OFS), part of the Bergen County Department of Human Services. Many of the original task force members served on the OFS advisory board. A key activity of OFS was the launch of the Oasis Insights care coordination database software that allows food pantries to better coordinate referrals with social service offices, including Senior Services, Veterans Services, Disability Services, Family Guidance and the Office for Children. The platform facilitates referrals, real-time case coordination, and holistic needs tracking. It is designed to create sustainable, scalable feedback loops between service providers and food access sites, reducing fragmentation and improving support for individuals navigating multiple systems.

## FOCUS AREA 3 | STRATEGY 4

## Screening and Referrals

**Provide cross-sector data integration, resources, technical assistance, and training to organizations on screening for program eligibility/need and providing closed-loop referrals to services.**

Direct service organizations are at the core of improving food security and many community-based, healthcare, education, and social service providers are increasingly positioned to integrate screening and referrals into settings where New Jerseyans already seek services. This strategy invests in building organizations' capacity through tailored resources, training, and technical assistance on screening for food and nutrition program eligibility or need, providing information on available resources, and conducting referrals to existing services.

This may include guidance on embedding screening into existing technological systems (such as electronic health records or case management platforms), establishing data-sharing protocols that prioritize trust, privacy, and purpose-driven data use, and adopting bi-directional referral tools that allow organizations to communicate and coordinate more effectively. Technical assistance may cover data collection and evaluation



### MODEL EXAMPLE

#### TRENTON HEALTH INFORMATION EXCHANGE

New Jersey's Trenton Health Team (THT) operates the Trenton Health Information Exchange (HIE). This shared infrastructure enables doctors and other providers to seamlessly share patient medical information across departments and facilities throughout Greater Trenton, leading to better coordinated healthcare, informed clinical decisions, reduced service duplication, and improved patient outcomes. Building on the HIE's success, THT plans to launch a Community Information Exchange (CIE). Similar to the HIE's longitudinal patient record, the CIE will create a comprehensive longitudinal person record by integrating non-clinical data such as food pantry visits and SNAP enrollment support. This new data will come from partners like food pantries and from participants themselves via surveys, assessments, and biometric data. The CIE model will allow partners to make real-time referrals and document outcomes and empower participants to manage their health and social needs, reducing fragmentation, accelerating support timelines, strengthening accountability, and supporting truly holistic, community-centered care.

practices, coalition-building, and applying for public funding to sustain these efforts. Training should be accessible, practical, culturally responsive, and available in multiple formats. By investing in organizational capacity and enabling more seamless communication across sectors, this strategy helps community partners more effectively connect people to resources, reduce administrative burden on both staff and households, and participate in coordinated food security efforts statewide.

FOCUS AREA 3 | STRATEGY 5

## Multi-benefit Hubs

**Establish multi-benefit hubs of various sizes, scales, and modalities to streamline enrollment and access to appropriate food and other social services.**

This strategy promotes the development of centralized access points, including in-person, mobile, and virtual modalities, where individuals can connect to multiple programs and services in one place. Multi-benefit hubs can reduce the burden of navigating separate systems by allowing residents

**MODEL EXAMPLE**

### GARFIELD UNITY HEALTH PARTNERSHIP

The Garfield Unity Health Partnership, a collaboration among the [Community Food Bank of New Jersey](#), [Greater Bergen Community Action](#), [Bergen Volunteer Medical Initiative \(BVMI\)](#), and [Community Behavioral Healthcare \(CBH Care\)](#), co-locates a variety of critically important social services in one facility in the City of Garfield. The first phase of the project launched in 2024, with the fully client-choice [Garfield Unity Food Pantry](#) opening and quickly becoming a vital resource within the community. This was followed in 2025 by the opening of BVMI on site, which provides free primary care services to individuals and families without health insurance in Bergen County. When services are fully operational, individuals and families will be able to access additional services, including behavioral healthcare and mental health services from CBH Care, and case management and navigation for services like utility assistance, Head Start placement, rental assistance and other housing-related support programs from Greater Bergen.



to complete applications, receive referrals, and access support for food, housing, healthcare, childcare, and workforce development programs through coordinated intake processes, including renewal and recertification of benefits individuals are accessing. Physical hubs might be located in community centers, clinics, libraries, or trusted nonprofit spaces, while virtual hubs could take the form of mobile-friendly portals or integrated case management platforms. These models improve efficiency, reduce stigma, and make it easier for individuals and families to receive the full range of services they are eligible for. They can also help enhance collaboration across sectors and strengthen the local safety net overall.

# 04

## FOCUS AREA 4

### Collaborate Across Sectors and State Agencies to Streamline and Strengthen Federal and State Food Security–Related Program Access and Delivery

#### 4.1 PUBLIC BENEFIT USER EXPERIENCE

Implement locally tailored improvements in accessibility, user experience, and dignity in benefit enrollment and recertification processes through simplified applications, technology advancements, digital access, and client-centered service design.

#### 4.2 PROGRAM OPPORTUNITIES TO ENHANCE PARTICIPATION

Protect and leverage federal and state funding and policy options to expand outreach efforts, modernize and streamline enrollment processes, and maximize benefits.

#### 4.3 FEDERAL NUTRITION PROGRAM OUTREACH AND REFERRALS

Implement comprehensive outreach and referral initiatives to connect individuals with state- and county-administered federal nutrition programs.

#### 4.4 STATE-LEVEL INTERAGENCY WORK GROUP(S)

Create state-level interagency work group(s) focused on protecting, aligning, coordinating, and streamlining federal, state, county, and local food security programs, and their administrative processes, definitions, regulations, and policies, where able.

#### 4.5 CROSS-SECTOR COORDINATION, TRAINING, AND RESOURCES

Provide coordination, cross-program training, interconnected digital platforms, and other resources to support staff across workforce development, Medicaid, housing, transportation, public health programs, and food assistance programs to provide client-centered, comprehensive services.

Federal and state nutrition programs remain some of the most powerful tools for addressing food insecurity. Expanding and streamlining access to these programs is essential to ensuring everyone can consistently obtain appropriate food. When benefit systems are accessible, trauma-informed, easy to navigate, and coordinated across sectors, more people can participate and programs operate more efficiently. This focus area promotes cross-sector, client-centered approaches to alleviate barriers to understanding, applying for, and participating in programs. It promotes simplifying applications, enhancing digital access, and improving customer service. It advances coordinated referral systems and shared outreach infrastructure to further strengthen the ability of healthcare, workforce, and housing partners to connect people to benefits. State-level leadership and interagency coordination are critical to scaling these changes and ensuring sustained improvements positively impact all implementation levels.

Programs such as SNAP, WIC, CACFP, school meals, Summer EBT, and senior nutrition services offer critical support to New Jersey families and great strides have been made to enhance and strengthen the programs in recent years, such as SNAP's efforts to increase [co-enrollment for families that are dually eligible for SNAP and WIC](#) and development of the multi-program application website, [MyNJHelps](#), WIC's implementation of [eWIC](#) and a [WIC online shopping planning project](#), and use of [Medicaid to directly certify children as eligible for free or reduced-price school meals](#). Yet, many eligible residents remain unenrolled due to burdensome application and certification processes, technology and digital barriers, language access challenges, and stigma. Additionally, findings from the Exploring the Six Dimensions Report show significant barriers to economic access, especially among parents, young adults, multilingual households, and residents with incomes below \$4,000 per month. Many eligible

residents remain unenrolled due to administrative burdens, confusing processes, limited digital access, and stigma.

This focus area addresses these barriers by improving the design, delivery, and coordination of programs. By modernizing user experience,

simplifying recertification and cross-enrollment, strengthening referrals, and establishing interagency work group(s), these strategies directly advance **Access** and **Stability**. They also support **Agency**, ensuring that public benefit systems operate with dignity, clarity, and choice, rather than confusion or burden.

**Sectors involved in implementing this focus area include:** state and county agencies, public health and Medicaid programs, healthcare, school districts, childcare entities, local governments, community-based organizations, and technology vendors. Each plays a role in delivering, referring, or supporting participation in food and nutrition programs.



### INTENDED OUTCOMES FROM IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIES WITHIN THIS FOCUS AREA INCLUDE:

- ▶ Increased participation in SNAP, WIC, school and childcare meals, and other federal nutrition programs among those eligible.<sup>36, 37</sup>
- ▶ Reduced administrative burden, less caseload churning, and lower client drop-off during enrollment and recertification.<sup>38, 39</sup>
- ▶ Improved program efficiency and staff capacity across state and local systems.
- ▶ Enhanced coordination across programs that support overall well-being, such as housing, health, and employment.
- ▶ Greater access to food security programs for communities facing systemic barriers to food security and program participation.

FOCUS AREA 4 | STRATEGY 1

## Public Benefit User Experience

**Implement locally tailored improvements in accessibility, user experience, and dignity of benefit enrollment and recertification processes through simplified applications, technology advancements, digital access, and client-centered service design.**

This strategy focuses on redesigning application and renewal systems to reduce paperwork, eliminate redundancies, and improve user-friendliness. Examples include mobile-friendly portals, auto-populated forms for clients already enrolled in other programs, and real-time application status tracking. It also calls for human-centered design improvements, such as plain language forms and data collection limited to what is essential for program operations. This can help entities meet individual needs of clients with respectful, trauma-informed customer service.



### MODEL EXAMPLE

#### MYNJHELPS MULTI-PROGRAM APPLICATION AND ACCOUNT PORTAL

The [MyNJHelps portal](#) is a multi-program application system that offers a streamlined, user-centered experience for New Jersey residents applying for public benefits. Programs currently included in the portal are the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Work First New Jersey (WFNJ) cash assistance (including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [TANF] and General Assistance [GA]), and the New Jersey Child Care Assistance Program. MyNJHelps reduces administrative burden for benefits program staff and enhances access to vital support for applicants. Launched with a major redesign in September 2022, the platform reflects best practices in digital service delivery. It is mobile- and desktop computer-friendly and designed to be intuitive and accessible across devices and browsers. With dynamic functionality, the portal adapts questions based on applicant responses, significantly shortening and simplifying the user journey.

#### Key features include:

- ▶ A joint application for SNAP, cash assistance, and childcare, reducing the need to apply multiple times.
- ▶ Real-time status updates, personalized notices, and the ability to submit reports and upload verification documents directly from a mobile device.
- ▶ A user account system that allows individuals to save and return to applications, view and submit changes to their profile and case information, request a replacement Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card, and receive important communications in one place.

MyNJHelps is integrated with other technology systems, ensuring seamless information flow to caseworkers for faster processing. The portal also provides links to health coverage options through New Jersey FamilyCare (Medicaid), as well as other resources

FOCUS AREA 4 | STRATEGY 2

## Program Opportunities to Enhance Participation

**Protect and leverage federal and state funding and policy options to expand outreach efforts, modernize and streamline enrollment processes, and maximize benefits.**

This strategy ensures that New Jersey takes full advantage of state and federal opportunities to expand access to food benefit programs. This includes using USDA administrative, healthcare, and other funding streams to reduce access gaps. It also encourages the use of state flexibilities and options to maximize eligibility, simplify renewals, and support coordinated outreach and awareness efforts on existing resources with trusted community partners. This approach can include pursuing modifications to state-level policies to allow WIC and Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program benefits to be accepted at mobile markets.

**MODEL EXAMPLE**

### SNAP NAVIGATOR PROGRAM EXPANSION

In recent years, the New Jersey Department of Human Services has strengthened its [SNAP Navigator Program](#), moving from just two contracted outreach partners and growing into a robust initiative with more than 25 partners that cover all 21 New Jersey counties. Outreach partners include healthcare systems like RWJBarnabas Health, food banks, food pantries, YMCAs, and other experienced community-based organizations. This model helps ensure that every county in New Jersey is served by trained Navigators who offer effective outreach and one-on-one application assistance. The program exemplifies a coordinated approach to outreach and referral, helping residents apply not only for SNAP but often connecting them with WIC, childcare, and other state-administered benefits. Embedding application support within healthcare settings, food access points, and trusted community organizations, can help reduce stigma, improve access, and close enrollment gaps.



FOCUS AREA 4 | STRATEGY 3

## Federal Nutrition Program Outreach and Referrals

**Implement comprehensive outreach and referral initiatives to connect individuals with state- and county-administered federal nutrition programs.**

This strategy supports a coordinated outreach infrastructure that connects residents with federal nutrition programs. It includes building referral partnerships with healthcare providers, workforce programs, and local governments; training staff across sectors on benefit eligibility; and deploying navigators who can assist with enrollment in multiple programs. Outreach can be tailored to the local community and co-developed with trusted community organizations.



FOCUS AREA 4 | STRATEGY 4

## State-level Interagency Work Group(s)

**Create state-level interagency work group(s) focused on protecting, aligning, coordinating, and streamlining federal, state, county, and local food security programs, and their administrative processes, definitions, regulations, and policies, where able.**

This strategy proposes forming statewide, cross-agency work group(s) to identify and address policy, administrative, and regulatory barriers that hinder access to food security programs. While continuing to operate within federal regulations and policies, the work group(s) could focus on items such as educating on/advocating for supportive policy, streamlining applications, maximizing eligibility options, simplifying reporting requirements, and identifying opportunities for shared infrastructure (e.g., intake systems, data platforms). Participation could include program administrators, frontline staff, and community representatives across counties to ensure solutions reflect lived expertise and operational realities.

FOCUS AREA 4 | STRATEGY 5

## Cross-sector Coordination, Training, and Resources

**Provide coordination, cross-program training, interconnected digital platforms, and other resources to support staff across workforce development, Medicaid, housing, transportation, public health programs, and food assistance programs to provide client-centered, comprehensive services.**

Individuals experiencing food insecurity often face concurrent challenges related to housing, healthcare, employment, and other areas. This strategy focuses on equipping staff within and across sectors with the knowledge, tools, and coordination needed to provide holistic, client-centered support. It includes offering cross-program training to help client-facing staff understand the full range of benefits and services available, including any recent changes to policy, how to help people understand their program benefits and eligibility, and how to make effective referrals. Interconnected digital platforms (e.g., referral directories, shared toolkits, or online portals) can further streamline service delivery. By supporting staff across systems, this strategy helps reduce fragmentation and ensures that individuals and families receive comprehensive and timely support, while retaining their confidentiality.

# 05

## FOCUS AREA 5

### Strengthen Food Systems Resiliency to Enhance Long-term Stability That Withstands Disruptions and Ensures Future Sustainability

#### 5.1 SUPPLY CHAIN SUSTAINABILITY INFRASTRUCTURE

Invest in tangible and intangible infrastructure improvements across the food supply chain to reduce waste, improve distribution efficiency in times of disruption, and enhance food security stability and sustainability.

#### 5.2 SUSTAINABLE FOOD PROCUREMENT AND WASTE DIVERSION

Educate and incentivize institutional, large-scale food generators (e.g., hospitals, universities, corporations, and businesses with food retail) to implement sustainable food procurement practices and support food waste diversion programs, prioritizing food donation.

#### 5.3 SUSTAINABLE FARMING PRACTICES

Promote incremental sustainable farming practices that improve soil health, conserve natural resources, and strengthen long-term food production resilience.

#### 5.4 FOOD DISTRIBUTION NETWORK DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

Enhance disaster preparedness across the food system, including strengthening charitable food distribution networks and providing education and technical assistance on risk mitigation for farmers.

#### 5.5 FOOD SECURITY POSITIONING IN CLIMATE WORK

Integrate food security within climate action.

Resilient food systems are those that can adapt, recover, and continue to provide stable access to appropriate food during times of disruption, including disruptions caused by extreme weather, economic shocks, policy changes, supply chain breakdowns, government shutdowns, and/or public health crises. This focus area emphasizes building the physical, environmental, and policy conditions needed to protect food access over the long term for all populations. However, some focus should be given to communities already facing persistent barriers and the food systems they participate in. This focus area seeks to embed resilience into every step of the food system. That includes investing in local infrastructure and the agriculture workforce, supporting climate-resilient agriculture, and ensuring that charitable food distribution systems are well prepared and coordinated. It also calls for aligning food system goals with climate action and environmental justice priorities. The result is a food system that not

only navigates disruption but also actively contributes to ecological and community health.

New Jersey's food system is vulnerable to both acute and chronic threats. As a coastal state, New Jersey faces rising climate-related risks, including flooding, drought, and extreme temperatures, all of which affect food production, transportation, and storage. At the same time, much of the state's food supply is dependent on external sources and just-in-time delivery systems, leaving gaps in access when logistics fail. During the COVID-19 pandemic, food supply chains were strained and charitable food networks overwhelmed, exposing the need for stronger backup systems and local capacity. Meanwhile, farmers, fishers, ranchers, and other food producers face resource limitations that hinder their ability to adapt to climate change and scale sustainable practices. Expert findings from the *Exploring the Six Dimensions Report's* sustainability survey clearly indicate that the

long-term viability of New Jersey’s food system is threatened by climate volatility, increasing production costs, land loss, and inequitable participation among farmers. Sustainability priorities, including supporting underrepresented growers (78%), reducing production costs (93%), and climate adaptation (77%), reflect urgent conditions that directly impact present and future food security.

This focus area identifies the strategies needed to build a resilient food system capable of withstanding environmental shocks, supporting equitable agricultural participation, and securing long-term food availability and access. Through investments in climate adaptation, land protection, sustainable practices, and emergency readiness, this focus area strengthens **Stability** and **Sustainability** while indirectly supporting **Availability** and **Agency**.

**Key sectors involved in this work include:** local food producers (such as farms and fisheries, dairy producers, etc.) and agricultural organizations, charitable food providers, environmental and climate agencies, local governments, transportation and infrastructure partners, philanthropy, and community-based food justice organizations. Their coordination is essential to creating resilient infrastructure and disaster planning, building adaptive capacity, and reducing systemic risk.



**INTENDED OUTCOMES FROM IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIES WITHIN THIS FOCUS AREA INCLUDE:**

- ▶ Greater continuity of food access during emergencies and supply chain disruptions.<sup>40</sup>
- ▶ Improved climate preparedness among farmers and food providers.<sup>41</sup>
- ▶ Reduced food waste through expanded storage and recovery infrastructure.<sup>42,43</sup>
- ▶ Increased investment in sustainable farming practices.<sup>43</sup>
- ▶ Stronger integration of food security goals within climate and emergency planning frameworks.<sup>44</sup>

## FOCUS AREA 5 | STRATEGY 1

## Supply Chain Sustainability Infrastructure

**Invest in tangible and intangible infrastructure improvements across the food supply chain to reduce waste, improve distribution efficiency in times of disruption, and enhance food security stability and sustainability.**

Targeted infrastructure improvements, such as expanded cold and dry storage, food-safe transportation, and decentralized distribution hubs, can reduce spoilage, shorten food miles, and increase the reliability of food access during disruptions. This strategy also supports technologies that help farmers adapt to climate change, such as drought-resistant practices or on-farm energy efficiency systems. Likewise, this strategy can also support intangible infrastructure investment, such as coordinating network connections and information sharing. Infrastructure investments should prioritize shared-use models and regional distribution points to maximize impact across communities and may provide temporary relief opportunities in non-chronic scenarios.

### MODEL EXAMPLE

#### FOOD ASSET MAP: CONNECTING SURPLUS FOOD AND THE CHARITABLE FOOD SECTOR

The [New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection](#) is developing an interactive online map to help reduce food waste and increase access to surplus food. This tool, called the Food Asset Map, will show where food generators (e.g., restaurants, grocery stores, and food manufacturers) have surplus food that could be used instead of thrown away.

#### The map will highlight:

- ▶ Where this extra food is located across New Jersey.
- ▶ What kind of surplus it is (e.g., food safe to eat, food for animals, or waste that can be composted).
- ▶ Location of food pantries, food banks, and other food rescue organizations.
- ▶ Location and description of facilities that manage food waste in ways other than sending it to landfills.

#### By showing this information in one place, the map can help communities and organizations:

- ▶ Identify gaps, places where food is going to waste and there aren't enough programs to rescue it.
- ▶ See opportunities to recover and redistribute more food locally.
- ▶ Coordinate food recovery and donation efforts more effectively.

With coordinated outreach to food generators, state and local partners can leverage this tool to better match surplus food with organizations that can help distribute it, resulting in strengthened food access, reduced food waste, and a better supported charitable food sector.

## FOCUS AREA 5 | STRATEGY 2

## Sustainable Food Procurement and Waste Diversion

**Educate and incentivize institutional, large-scale food generators (e.g., hospitals, universities, corporations, and businesses with food retail) to implement sustainable food procurement practices and support food waste diversion programs, prioritizing food donation.**

Large institutions (e.g., hospitals, universities, and corporate cafeterias) generate significant amounts of surplus food that often goes to waste despite being safe and edible. This strategy promotes education, technical assistance, and tactics that can make a business case for sustainability among the private sector. This may include government incentive programs, expanding food recovery efforts, and supporting best practices in sustainability and compliance with statewide goals, including New Jersey's Food Waste Reduction Act. It also may include developing clear, statewide guidance, offering training on liability protections and donation logistics, and connecting institutions with local recovery organizations. Incentives could include recognition programs, tax benefits, or streamlined reporting mechanisms.

### MODEL EXAMPLE

#### UNIVERSITY FOOD WASTE DIVERSION PROGRAMS

Universities across New Jersey are advancing sustainable food procurement through robust food waste diversion initiatives that reduce environmental impact while supporting community food access. At [Rutgers University](#), Dining Services recovers surplus food for donation, [diverts food scraps for animal feed](#), and integrates composting practices campus-wide. Through partnerships with local nonprofits and farms, Rutgers transforms pre-consumer waste into resources; for example donating usable food to organizations like Elijah's Promise and sending scraps to livestock operations. Similarly, [Princeton University](#) incorporates waste minimization into its dining sustainability plan, sending food waste to farms for animal feed or recycling it into renewable energy and compost at [Trenton Renewables](#) and eliminating trays to reduce waste. Both institutions embed sustainability into procurement policies by reducing overproduction and training staff on food waste prevention. These programs showcase how large institutions can implement sustainable food strategies that reduce waste, improve efficiency, and strengthen community partnerships.



FOCUS AREA 5 | STRATEGY 3

## Sustainable Farming Practices

**Promote incremental sustainable farming practices that improve soil health, conserve natural resources, and strengthen long-term food production resilience.**

This strategy supports efforts to help farmers adopt sustainable practices that protect soil, water, and biodiversity while enhancing productivity and resilience to climate variability. Practices may include crop rotation, cover cropping, reduced tillage, organic amendments, or water-efficient irrigation. Technical assistance, demonstration projects, and cost-sharing programs can lower the barriers for farms of all sizes to participate.

FOCUS AREA 5 | STRATEGY 4

## Food Distribution Network Disaster Preparedness

**Enhance disaster preparedness across the food system, including strengthening charitable food distribution networks and providing education and technical assistance on risk mitigation for farmers.**

This strategy promotes cross-sector planning, investment, and capacity-building to ensure the continuity of food access in times of crisis, including extreme weather, economic shocks, policy changes, supply chain breakdowns, or

public health crises. On the charitable food side, this may include improving coordination across food banks and pantries, increasing storage capacity, and developing rapid-response protocols, including tracking real-time emergency response donation needs and distribution. On the production side, it may involve supporting farmers with climate forecasting tools, insurance access, and disaster response training. A more resilient system anticipates shocks and has built-in mechanisms to respond timely and efficiently.

FOCUS AREA 5 | STRATEGY 5

## Food Security Positioning in Climate Work

**Integrate food security within climate action.**

This strategy ensures that food systems are not siloed from broader climate and resilience planning. It calls for food access, production, and distribution considerations to be included in state and regional climate strategies, emergency preparedness plans, and environmental justice initiatives. This includes advocating for food system partners to have a seat at the table in climate planning processes and for public investments that advance both food security and sustainability goals.

**MODEL EXAMPLE**

### TEPPER FOUNDATION COLLECTIVE EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS PLANNING EXERCISES

In July 2023, [The Tepper Foundation](#) invested resources to bring together five food banks for a facilitated discussion on a realistic emergency preparedness scenario. The focus of the discussion was “If a Category 4 hurricane made landfall on New Jersey’s coastline, how would its food banks respond? How would these essential, frontline organizations plan to make sure the most vulnerable communities would be supported? How would they work together?”

**A certified emergency manager led the exercise and focused on several key questions:**

1. As the hurricane strengthened in the Atlantic Ocean, how would the food banks prepare their staff and alert their communities?
2. As the storm made landfall, how would the food banks assess impacts and the need for feeding across the state, particularly if some localized food distribution networks were disrupted or if one or more food banks were unable to operate due to disaster damage?
3. In the weeks following the storm, what long-term strategies would best ensure that all New Jerseyans have reliable access to food?

The results of the exercise were documented and used to inform the foundation’s [Crisis Response and Climate Resilience Portfolio](#).

# Connecting Strategies to the Six Dimensions of Food Security: A Joint Display Table

The joint display below offers a streamlined view of how the pieces of this Strategic Plan fit together. It brings together the Six Dimensions of Food Security Framework, focus area strategies, and the *Exploring the Six Dimensions Report* data into one place so readers can quickly visualize the logic

behind the Plan and understand how different elements reinforce each other. This is meant to be a helpful guide, but is not an exhaustive record of every data point or idea gathered throughout the Strategic Plan development process. Likewise, the strategies indicated in each dimension

represent the priorities strongly supported by the research evidence, partner input, and the Plan's overall direction, but they may also fit in additional dimensions. The joint display table is designed to help make sense of the landscape and spark alignment, not to capture every detail.

**TABLE 1** | Joint display of the six dimensions of food security by focus area strategies by *Exploring Six Dimensions Report* by the strategic fit for New Jersey

DIMENSION	ALIGNED STRATEGIES <sup>a</sup>	EXPLORING THE SIX DIMENSIONS REPORT METRICS (SUMMARY) <sup>b</sup>	STRATEGIC FIT FOR NEW JERSEY
 <p><b>ACCESS</b> Economic, physical, and social resources required to obtain appropriate foods.</p>	FA1.1, FA1.3, FA2.1, FA2.3, FA3.1, FA3.4, FA3.5, FA4.1, FA4.2, FA4.3, FA4.4, FA4.5	Barriers are highest for parents/caregivers, young adults, multilingual households, and residents with incomes below \$4,000 per month; with challenges being able to afford food and/or eligible households remaining unenrolled in federal nutrition programs.	Cost of living, transit barriers, and complex federal nutrition program rules limit economic and geographic access, especially for families, immigrants, and low-income residents.  <b>THESE STRATEGIES</b> can reduce administrative burden, expand localized distribution, strengthen trusted outreach and navigation, and modernize public benefits delivery to remove economic and logistical barriers to food.
 <p><b>AVAILABILITY</b> The physical presence of sufficient, safe, and nutritious food.</p>	FA1.1, FA1.3, FA2.1, FA2.2, FA2.3, FA2.4, FA3.2, FA5.2, FA5.5	Availability is lowest among caregivers, non-English speakers, younger adults, pantry users, and low-income households, with pronounced gaps in certain urban and lower-income counties; facing insufficiency in some store and pantry offerings.	New Jersey has strong agricultural production but uneven in-state distribution and limited storage and aggregation capacity.  <b>THESE STRATEGIES</b> can improve mapping of gaps, expand community-based and regional infrastructure, and protect in-state production, collectively increasing the physical presence of adequate food across the state.

<sup>a</sup> Aligned strategies are displayed as the focus area number followed by the strategy number. For example Focus Area 2 Strategy 4 is displayed as FA2.4.

<sup>b</sup> Summaries provided are not exhaustive of the *Exploring the Six Dimensions Report* findings.

DIMENSION	ALIGNED STRATEGIES <sup>a</sup>	EXPLORING THE SIX DIMENSIONS REPORT METRICS (SUMMARY) <sup>b</sup>	STRATEGIC FIT FOR NEW JERSEY
 <p><b>UTILIZATION</b> The reliability of food access and availability across time and disruptions.</p>	<p>FA1.2, FA2.1, FA2.4, FA3.4, FA3.5, FA4.3, FA4.5</p>	<p>Barriers are concentrated among SNAP users, pantry clients, and low-income households, and include limited kitchen equipment, time, and food knowledge/skills.</p>	<p>Housing costs and crowded or substandard housing reduce kitchen quality and storage capacity for some residents.</p> <p><b>THESE STRATEGIES</b> can expand culturally relevant nutrition education, strengthen shared kitchens and community processing, support equipment access, and improve program-based food and nutrition supports, enabling residents to make full use of the food available to them.</p>
 <p><b>STABILITY</b> The reliable access to foods over time.</p>	<p>FA1.1, FA1.3, FA2.1, FA2.2, FA3.2, FA3.4, FA4.1, FA4.2, FA5.1, FA5.4</p>	<p>Instability is higher among caregivers, non-English speakers, and SNAP/WIC users, pantry users, under \$2,000 per month incomes, and is intensified by climate events, income volatility, and rising housing costs.</p>	<p>New Jersey faces seasonal and monthly fluctuations in need, climate-related disruptions, and economic pressures that destabilize household food security.</p> <p><b>THESE STRATEGIES</b> can improve forecasting and data use, build supply chain resilience, strengthen county-level crisis coordination, stabilize benefit access, and invest in climate-aligned infrastructure and preparedness to protect consistent access over time.</p>
 <p><b>AGENCY</b> The capacity to make decisions and participate in shaping food systems.</p>	<p>FA1.2, FA2.2, FA2.4, FA3.1, FA3.2, FA3.3, FA3.5, FA4.1, FA4.5, FA5.3</p>	<p>Agency among the lowest-scoring dimension, with especially low engagement among pantry users, young adults, parents, multilingual households, North and South Jersey, and SNAP/WIC participants facing barriers in food choice and preferred food offerings in their environments.</p>	<p>Systemic barriers, stigma, and limited opportunities for meaningful participation reduce residents' ability to shape food policies and programs in New Jersey.</p> <p><b>THESE STRATEGIES</b> can enhance transparency, elevate community voice, expand participatory and county-based structures, improve dignity in benefit access, and support more equitable farmer and community leadership, strengthening both individual and collective agency.</p>
 <p><b>SUSTAINABILITY</b> The long-term regenerative capacity of food systems for future generations.</p>	<p>FA1.1, FA1.2, FA2.1, FA2.2, FA2.3, FA5.1, FA5.2, FA5.3, FA5.4</p>	<p>Experts prioritize climate and weather impacts, production costs, farmer support and employment, farmland loss, and supply chain fragility.</p> <p>Residents and 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</p>	<p>New Jersey's food system is vulnerable to climate change, rising production costs, land development pressure, and supply chain disruptions.</p> <p><b>THESE STRATEGIES</b> can support climate-smart agricultural practices, protect farmland and local production capacity, strengthen sustainable procurement and infrastructure, and help ensure that underrepresented farmers and communities can participate in and benefit from a resilient, future-ready food system.</p>

<sup>a</sup> Aligned strategies are displayed as the focus area number followed by the strategy number. For example Focus Area 2 Strategy 4 is displayed as FA2.4.

<sup>b</sup> Summaries provided are not exhaustive of the *Exploring the Six Dimensions Report* findings.

# Defining Strategic Plan Success

Success for this Strategic Plan will be measured not by the completion of individual tasks, but by the degree to which it strengthens how New Jersey coordinates, invests in, and advances food security efforts. We define success as being reflected in:

▶ **Multi-sector Adoption and Use of the Plan.**

Success will mean that partners see themselves reflected in this Plan and use it as a shared framework for collective action. Multi-sector adoption is a key marker of progress with the strategies outlined here becoming common reference points to guide programs, policies, funding decisions, research, and operational improvements statewide.

▶ **Growth in Aligned Activities and Investments.**

Success will also be reflected in measurable increases in activities aligned with the plan's five Focus Areas. Over time, we expect to see expanded programming, pilot initiatives, and sustained investment that correspond with these priorities. This includes both scaling or continuing already effective models and developing new approaches inspired by the plan.

▶ **Stronger Coordination and Partnerships.**

Progress will additionally be reflected in new partnerships, improved coordination, and reduced fragmentation. Evidence may include shared data systems, aligned evaluation approaches, streamlined processes across agencies, coordinated funding, and increased statewide capacity to implement responsive and

culturally grounded solutions. These changes signal a more coherent, resilient food system.

▶ **Improved Food Security and Well-Being for New Jerseyans.**

Ultimately, the strongest indicator of success will be whether collective implementation contributes to meaningful improvements in food security and well-being for New Jersey residents. While this remains the long-term goal, it is important to note that population-level health and well-being indicators typically shift over long periods, and measurable statewide change may extend well beyond this three-year planning horizon.

**Measuring success will be grounded in the Six Dimensions of Food Security Framework.**

Tracking progress in these areas requires an approach that reflects both the complexity of food insecurity and the legislative mandate to identify and address gaps in underserved areas. The Six Dimensions of Food Security Framework provide the foundation for this approach. Rather than measuring only whether households have enough food, this Framework assesses the conditions that shape food security and reveals how systemic strengths,

## SHORT-TERM INDICATORS OF SUCCESS TO BE EVALUATED BY OFSA

- ▶ Increased adoption and use of the Strategic Plan across sectors
- ▶ Growth in activities, programs, and investments aligned with the Plan's Focus Areas
- ▶ Emergence of new project types, pilots, and initiatives inspired by the Strategic Plan
- ▶ Increased cross-sector partnerships and collaboration
- ▶ Establishment or expansion of shared data, evaluation tools, and coordinated measurement approaches
- ▶ Increased public and private funding aligned to Strategic Plan priorities
- ▶ Increased organizational capacity statewide to implement equitable food security strategies
- ▶ Advancements in policy change, demonstrated by the adoption or revision of organizational policies and practices ("little p" policy), as well as movement on legislation and regulations ("big P" Policy)
- ▶ Progress toward improved food security outcomes using quantitative measures and community-reported experience

weaknesses, and pressures influence outcomes across communities. This multidimensional lens helps the state understand where improvement is needed, what is working well, and how programs and policies perform under both stable and stressed conditions.

**Because this Strategic Plan is intended for use across all sectors, implementation and evaluation will occur through collective effort.** OFSA's role focuses on monitoring statewide, systems-level trends, disaggregating by sector or community when able. OFSA will track core indicators aligned with the six dimensions of food security and the

Strategic Plan's Focus Areas to monitor trends over time, identify disparities, and understand whether the food system is becoming more equitable, resilient, and responsive.

As partners implement strategies within their own contexts, they are encouraged to evaluate their impacts in alignment with the intended outcomes identified in each Focus Area. These outcomes are not meant to be exhaustive; rather, they serve as shared guideposts that help organizations understand how their work contributes to statewide goals and meaningful impact. Aligning local evaluation with these outcomes strengthens

coherence across sectors, supports consistent learning, and reinforces the systems-level changes this plan seeks to advance.

Taken together, this evaluation structure positions New Jersey to understand not only whether conditions are improving but also how and why change is happening, including whether improvements are durable in the face of economic, climatic, policy, or supply chain disruptions. It strengthens accountability to the legislative mandate, supports learning across partners, and ensures that progress is viewed through a systems lens.



# Call to Action

**The New Jersey Food Security Strategic Plan is both a coordinated direction and an invitation to think about the nuances of food security, to work jointly across sectors, and to build a more resilient food system together. It affirms a shared commitment to ensuring that every resident can reliably access and use appropriate and preferred foods with dignity, stability, and choice. Grounded in community voice, additional evidence, and cross-sector collaboration, this Plan reflects years of community building, research, and lived expertise across the state.**

New Jersey's leadership in advancing the Six Dimensions of Food Security Framework positions the state as a national model for systems-based approaches to food security. By pairing community connections with data-driven analysis, we demonstrate how food security can be addressed as both a human right and a structural challenge, one that requires long-term alignment across government, philanthropy, community organizations, health systems, education, agriculture, academia, and the for-profit and corporate sector. The Strategic Plan provides a unified direction, but its success depends on how each sector contributes to a more resilient food security system.

As we move into implementation, we call on partners to pay attention to the disparities highlighted throughout this plan and to respond with strategies that intentionally reduce inequities. Food insecurity is not experienced evenly across New Jersey, and meaningful progress requires understanding where gaps persist and acting decisively to address them.

We also encourage every sector and every New Jerseyan to see themselves within this work, even industries that have not traditionally considered themselves part of the food security landscape. Food security affects the stability of schools, healthcare systems, workplaces, and local economies; a fragile food system leaves all communities vulnerable during moments of stress. Strengthening food security strengthens the state as a whole, and each partner plays a role in building community well-being, a stronger economy, and resilient food systems and agriculture.

To support the application of the Strategic Plan in practice, OFSA will release supplemental resource materials, including an Implementation Toolkit, to help translate strategies into actionable tactics (see **Figure 4**). These resources will offer guidance, templates, best practices, and examples to assist partners in adapting strategies to their community contexts. The Implementation Toolkit will bridge the “what and why” of this plan to the “how and who” of moving the strategies into action.



## We invite all partners to:

- ▶ **Adopt the Six Dimensions of Food Security Framework**, identifying how their work contributes to the larger effort and using it as a shared lens for planning, decision-making, and evaluation;
- ▶ **Act on identified disparities**, prioritizing strategies that reduce inequities across race, age, geography, language, and income;
- ▶ **Identify your role within the food system**, recognizing that all residents and sectors benefit from a resilient, sustainable system, and are vulnerable when it falters;
- ▶ **Engage cross-sector partners**, collaborating across agencies, organizations, municipalities, and industries to align strategies and strengthen impact;
- ▶ **Ensure community leadership is centered and compensated**, continually embedding individuals with lived and living expertise with food insecurity in program design, implementation, and evaluation;
- ▶ **Participate in data sharing, measurement, and learning**, using common indicators and contributing to statewide transparency and accountability;
- ▶ **Strengthen internal capacity and infrastructure**, supporting coordinated, locally grounded, and responsive food security work;

- ▶ **Encourage for-profit and corporate partner engagement**, recognizing their influence in shaping food access, affordability, employment, transportation, and supply chain stability, and identifying where their engagement can contribute to statewide resilience;
- ▶ **Use the forthcoming Implementation Toolkit**, translating strategies into actionable tactics, adopting best practices, and aligning local evaluation with the intended outcomes for each focus area; and
- ▶ **Champion innovation and equity**, supporting both immediate solutions and long-term

structural changes that build a stronger, more just food system.

Through this shared Strategic Plan, New Jersey has the opportunity to move toward more connected, resilient, community-driven solutions, ones that strengthen health, dignity, and stability for all residents. The success of this Strategic Plan depends on partnership, shared accountability, and a commitment to long-term systems change. Together, we can build the foundation for a more equitable and resilient food system that better serves New Jersey for generations to come.



# Appendices

## Appendix 1. Glossary of Key Terms

**Aggregation:** Collecting food from multiple producers for distribution through wholesale, retail, or institutional channels.

**Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP):** Reimburses nutritious meals served in childcare, adult day care, after-school programs, and emergency shelters.

**Closed-Loop Referrals:** Referrals in which the organization initiating the referral (for services, support, or resources) receives confirmation that the receiving organization has accepted, acted on, or completed the referral. This creates a full “loop” of communication that ensures individuals are successfully connected to the services they need.

**Cold Storage:** Temperature-controlled systems ensuring food remains safe and fresh across the supply chain.

**Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP):** Provides monthly USDA food packages to low-income adults aged 60+.

**Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA):** A model where consumers purchase a share of a local farm’s harvest.

**Data Infrastructure:** Refers to the systems, tools, and partnerships that support the collection, sharing, and use of data across sectors such as health, education, and social services

**Food Enterprise:** A business or organization involved in producing, processing, distributing, or selling food, particularly community-rooted enterprises.

**Food Hub:** A business or organization that aggregates, stores, processes, and distributes locally and regionally produced foods.

**Food Is Medicine:** Programs integrating food access into healthcare settings, such as produce prescriptions or medically tailored groceries.

**Local Procurement:** Purchasing food grown or produced within a specific region to support local economies.

**Market Channel:** A pathway through which producers provide goods to buyers, including the intermediaries, infrastructure, and transactions that connect them. Market channels can include various opportunities to reach consumers, such as retail, institutional purchasing, direct-to-consumer outlets (e.g., farmers markets), food hubs, charitable food networks, and other emerging distribution models.

**Mobile Market/Mobile Pantry:** Vehicles that distribute fresh or shelf-stable food to communities with limited food retail access.

**Multi-Benefit Hub:** A centralized location (physical, mobile, or virtual) where residents can access multiple social services in one place.

**National School Lunch Program (NSLP):** Provides nutritious, low-cost or free lunches to students.

**Nutrition Incentives:** Programs that increase the value of SNAP or WIC benefits when used to purchase fruits and vegetables.

**School Breakfast Program (SBP):** Provides nutritious breakfasts to students, including free and reduced-price options.

**Seamless Summer Option (SSO):** Allows school districts to serve free summer meals using their school-year meal program structure.

**Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP):** Provides low-income older adults with coupons for fresh produce at farmers' markets.

**Social Safety Net:** Programs and policies that help individuals and families meet basic needs, including food, housing, and healthcare.

**Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC):** Provides nutritious foods, breastfeeding support, and nutrition education for eligible pregnant/postpartum women, infants, and young children.

**Summer EBT:** Provides eligible families with grocery-buying benefits during summer months.

**Summer Food Service Program (SFSP):** Provides free meals and snacks to children during summer months.

**Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP):** Provides monthly benefits to purchase food using an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card.

**Technical Assistance:** Training, coaching, or tools that help organizations build capacity to deliver food security programs.

**The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP):** Supplies USDA-purchased foods to food banks and emergency food providers.

**Trauma-informed:** An approach that acknowledges the effects of trauma and prioritizes safety, choice, and trust in all interactions and services.

**Value-Added Processing:** Transforming raw agricultural products into higher-value goods to increase revenue and market access.

## Appendix 2. Existing Literature Analyzed to Inform the Strategic Plan

### Existing Food Security in New Jersey Recommendation Reports

- ▶ *Hunger and Its Solutions in New Jersey: Landscape Analysis of Current Initiatives, Recommended Action, and Emerging Opportunities for Further Investment* | Food Research & Action Center
- ▶ *Hunger and Its Solutions in New Jersey: A Supplemental Brief on the Landscape of the Federal Nutrition Programs* | Food Research & Action Center
- ▶ *New Jersey Roadmap for Food System Resilience* | by the New Jersey Food Democracy Collaborative
- ▶ *Blueprint for Economic Justice & Shared Prosperity* | New Jersey Policy Perspective
- ▶ *Boosting NJ SNAP: Eliminating Barriers to Participation* | Hunger Free New Jersey
- ▶ *Camden Food Security Collective* | by the Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers and the Food Bank of South Jersey
- ▶ *The Camden Health Element* | by the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission
- ▶ *Community Health Assessments and Plans* | various counties and regional healthcare systems in partnership with Healthy New Jersey 2030
- ▶ *Cultivating Camden: The City's Food Economy Strategy* | by the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission
- ▶ *Sustainable Organic Material Management Plan* | by the New Jersey Climate Change Alliance Organics Workgroup at Rutgers University
- ▶ *Disrupting Food Insecurity: Tapping Data for Strategies that Tackle the Root Causes dashboard and Steps Communities Can Take report* | by the Urban Institute
- ▶ *Food for Thought: The State of Afterschool Meals in New Jersey* | by Hunger Free New Jersey
- ▶ *Hunger Hampers Education for Many New Jersey College Students* | by Hunger Free New Jersey
- ▶ *Hunger in South Jersey* | by the Food Bank of South Jersey
- ▶ *New Brunswick Community Food Assessment* | New Brunswick Community Food Alliance
- ▶ *New Jersey Summer Meals for Kids: 2020 Snapshot* | Hunger Free New Jersey
- ▶ *Community Conversations: Pandemic Perspectives, New Jersey's COVID-19 Storytelling Project* | by the New Jersey YMCA State Alliance, the New Jersey Department of Health, and Healthy New Jersey 2030
- ▶ *Nurture New Jersey: 2021 Strategic Plan* | by Nurture NJ
- ▶ *Older New Jersey Residents Need Nutrition Assistance* | Hunger Free New Jersey
- ▶ *Strategic Initiatives: Healthy Food Access Workgroup and Food and Economic Development Workgroup* | New Brunswick Community Food Alliance
- ▶ *Supporting Healthy Corner Store Development in New Jersey: A Report of the New Jersey Healthy Corner Store Task Force* | by The Food Trust and New Jersey Partnership for Healthy Kids

## New Jersey Food Security Offices and Programs and Initiatives

### ▶ [New Jersey Department of Human Services](#)

- » [New Jersey Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\)](#)
- » [Work First New Jersey](#)
- » [Child Care Assistance Program](#)

### ▶ [New Jersey Department of Health](#)

- » [New Jersey Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children \(WIC\)](#)
- » [Senior Nutrition Programs](#)
- » [Public Health and Food Protection Program](#)
- » [Nutrition and Fitness webpage initiatives](#)

### ▶ [New Jersey Department of Agriculture](#)

- » [Jersey Fresh/Jersey Raised](#)
- » [Farm to School](#)
- » [School Nutrition Programs and Summer EBT](#)
- » [More Meals Less Waste](#)
- » [Child and Adult Care Food Program \(CACFP\)](#)
- » [Food Distribution Programs](#)

### ▶ [New Jersey Economic Development Authority](#)

- » [Food Security Initiatives](#)

## Appendix 3: Summary of Focus Areas and Strategies

### FOCUS AREA 1

#### *Enhance Information Exchange and Access to Improve Public Awareness, Optimize Programs, and Support Data-Driven Decision-Making*

- 1.1 Data Coordination:** Coordinate state agencies across sectors to make existing food security–related data available across programs, voluntarily and where possible.
- 1.2 Impact Analysis and Research:** Conduct analyses on the health and economic impacts of food insecurity and research the effectiveness and cost-benefit of food security initiatives and policies.
- 1.3 Data Visualization and Dissemination:** Invest in coordinated, intuitive, asset-based data dashboards and visualization tools that can be customized to support community initiatives.

### FOCUS AREA 2

#### *Expand Community-Based Food Infrastructure and Market Channel Creation for Enhanced Ongoing Food Access, Utilization, and Availability*

- 2.1 Food Access and Availability Infrastructure:** Increase investment in transportation, technology, and infrastructure improvements to increase availability and access to food across the food supply chain and access to food/nutrition programs.
- 2.2 Agriculture Workforce and Land Access:** Promote community-centered approaches that support the agricultural workforce and increase access to land for food production.

**2.3 Market Channel Creation:** Leverage federal, state, institutional, and charitable food purchasing dollars to support farmers and regional supply chains, expand local procurement opportunities, and build long-term demand for a variety of New Jersey-grown foods.

**2.4 Food Enterprise Investment:** Invest in community-rooted food enterprises and infrastructure to strengthen appropriate and preferred food utilization and economic opportunity.

### FOCUS AREA 3

#### *Build and Support Local Partnerships to Advance Community-Driven Food Security Approaches*

- 3.1 Tailored Education, Outreach, and Awareness Efforts:** Launch new, and support existing, community-informed education, outreach, and awareness efforts to increase participation in local food security programs and build trust and partnerships with populations with lived and living experiences of food insecurity.
- 3.2 County-level Coordination:** Support action-oriented local food coalitions through county-level coordination that brings together partners across sectors to align food security efforts, develop and implement localized strategies, and share funding opportunities.
- 3.3 Bi-directional Community Engagement:** Establish consistent bi-directional community engagement strategies that feed into strengthening coordination between local and state food coalitions to inform decision-making and support implementation of long-term innovative and scalable food security strategies.

**3.4 Screening and Referrals:** Provide cross-sector data integration, resources, technical assistance, and training to organizations on screening for program eligibility/need and providing closed-loop referrals to services.

**3.5 Multi-benefit Hubs:** Establish multi-benefit hubs of various sizes, scales, and modalities to streamline enrollment and access to appropriate food and other social services.

#### FOCUS AREA 4

##### *Collaborate Across Sectors and Across State Agencies to Streamline and Strengthen Federal and State Food Security–Related Program Access and Delivery*

**4.1 Public Benefit User Experience:** Implement locally tailored improvements in accessibility, user experience, and dignity in benefit enrollment and recertification processes through simplified applications, technology advancements, digital access, and client-centered service design.

**4.2 Program Opportunities to Enhance Participation:** Protect and leverage federal and state funding and policy options to expand outreach efforts, modernize and streamline enrollment processes, and maximize benefits.

**4.3 Federal Nutrition Program Outreach and Referrals:** Implement comprehensive outreach and referral initiatives to connect individuals with state- and county-administered federal nutrition programs.

**4.4 State-level Interagency Work Group(s):** Create state-level interagency work group(s) focused on protecting, aligning, coordinating, and streamlining federal, state, county, and local food security programs, and their administrative processes, definitions, regulations, and policies, where able.

**4.5 Cross-sector Coordination, Training, and Resources:** Provide coordination, cross-program training, interconnected digital platforms, and other resources to support staff across workforce development, Medicaid, housing, transportation, public health programs, and food assistance programs to provide client-centered, comprehensive services.

#### FOCUS AREA 5

##### *Strengthen Food Systems Resiliency to Enhance Long-term Stability that Withstands Disruptions and Ensures Future Sustainability*

**5.1 Supply Chain Sustainability Infrastructure:** Invest in tangible and intangible infrastructure improvements across the food supply chain to reduce waste, improve distribution efficiency in times of disruption, and enhance food security stability and sustainability.

**5.2 Sustainable Food Procurement and Waste Diversion:** Educate and incentivize institutional, large-scale food generators (e.g., hospitals, universities, corporations, and businesses with food retail) to implement sustainable food procurement practices and support food waste diversion programs, prioritizing food donation.

**5.3 Sustainable Farming Practices:** Promote incremental sustainable farming practices that improve soil health, conserve natural resources, and strengthen long-term food production resilience.

**5.4 Food Distribution Network Disaster Preparedness:** Enhance disaster preparedness across the food system, including strengthening charitable food distribution networks and providing education and technical assistance on risk mitigation for farmers.

**5.5 Food Security Positioning in Climate Work:** Integrate food security within climate action.

# Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> State Fact Sheets -State Data. (n.d.). Retrieved September 26, 2025, from <https://data.ers.usda.gov/reports.aspx?ID=4035&StateFIPS=34&StateName=New%20Jersey>
- <sup>2</sup> USDA Census of Agriculture, 2022. 2022 Census of Agriculture State Profile: New Jersey. Available at: [https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2022/Online\\_Resources/County\\_Profiles/New\\_Jersey/cp99034.pdf](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2022/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/New_Jersey/cp99034.pdf)
- <sup>3</sup> 2022 Census of Agriculture State Profile: New Jersey. (2022). United States Department of Agriculture. [https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2022/Online\\_Resources/County\\_Profiles/New\\_Jersey/cp99034.pdf](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2022/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/New_Jersey/cp99034.pdf)
- <sup>4</sup> Rabbitt, M. P., Reed-Jones, M., Hales, L. J., & Burke, M. P. (2024). Household food security in the United States in 2023 (Report No. ERR-337). U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. <https://doi.org/10.32747/2024.8583175.ers>
- <sup>5</sup> Feeding America Map the Meal Gap. (2025). Food Insecurity in New Jersey. <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2023/overall/new-jersey>
- <sup>6</sup> The data source for this metric indicates that “‘Latino’ refers to persons who identify as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin. This population is sometimes referred to simply as “Hispanic.” Latino or Hispanic origin can be viewed as the heritage, nationality, lineage, or country of birth of the person or person’s parents or ancestors before arriving in the United States. It includes Latino individuals who identify as both Latino and any race.”
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