

# NYC Good Food Purchasing Program Coalition

## COVID-19 Values-Based Rapid Response Plan & Recommendations

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The Good Food Purchasing Program (GFPP) incentivizes public institutions to redirect public tax-payers' dollars toward institutional food purchasing that is good for public health, our local economy, workers, animals, and the environment. Deep inequities, cruelties, and waste were endemic to this system before the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. This crisis, however, has shone a light on longstanding exploitation, inequities, and vulnerabilities in our food system, all of which cannot go unaddressed any longer.

Entire communities, particularly Black and Latinx communities, lack consistent access to nutritious foods that sustain healthy bodies and immune systems. This is not coincidental. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought into sharp focus the race- and class-based health disparities that have been evident and mounting for centuries. Not surprisingly, according to the NYC Dept. of Health<sup>1</sup>, Black and Latinx people are nearly twice as likely to die from COVID-19 in NYC than White New Yorkers, and according to the NYS Dept of Health<sup>2</sup>, 89.8% of those who have died due to COVID-19 had at least one comorbidity (leading with hypertension). Poor people, especially those from communities of color and the elderly, experience higher rates of pre-existing and preventable diet-related diseases, hospitalizations and death. New York City and State have both the resources and ability to reverse this.

A strong local and regional economy would be able to pivot quickly to meet NYC's rapidly changing and incredibly diverse demands for food. When confronted with corporate agriculture supply chain disruptions, our local and regional farms, processing plants, distribution channels, and businesses are what make our communities resilient. A key tenet of the Good Food Purchasing Program is to ensure that public agencies commit to both changing the policies and practices of large food and agri-businesses by holding them accountable to a holistic set of values, while also creating concrete pathways for small- and mid-sized vendors of this region to access and compete in the marketplace for institutional suppliers. Additionally, the workers who grow, process, transport, prepare, and sell food do not have adequate pay or protection under normal circumstances, much less in a global crisis. Farmers and small businesses, especially those owned by Black, Latinx and Indigenous people, have precarious livelihoods that are threatened by even a short-term loss of revenue.

The pandemic has also brought to light horrendous practices and significant vulnerabilities in the food supply chain. In addition to human suffering, inhumane conditions of industrial animal agriculture contribute to unnecessary suffering for billions of animals, while contributing to diseases that must be constantly managed with the use of antibiotics. The US government is seeking to eliminate, amend and otherwise exploit existing regulations, in order to speed up kill lines at pig, cattle, turkey and chicken slaughterhouses, further risking the safety of workers and compromising animal welfare, food safety, and the environment.

While none of these are new problems, the pandemic allows us to see them more clearly, painting a picture of a food system in urgent need of transformation. These values, when *not* addressed in siloes – including those which are utilized in emergency capacities such as what our nation is experiencing during the COVID-19 pandemic – have the ability to spark transformative, systems-wide change by functioning in tandem with one another. **The Good Food Purchasing Program's values and principles provide guidance for ensuring emergency measures enacted *today* contribute to our vision of a just, healthy, equitable, humane and sustainable food system and help to secure the stability of our nation's food supply into the future. To that end, the NYC-Good Food Purchasing Program Coalition offers the following:**

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<sup>1</sup> NYC Dept. of Health: [NYC DOH: COVID-19 Data](#)

<sup>2</sup> NYS Department of Health [Workbook: NYS COVID19 Tracker](#)

## **Recommendations to Implement Food-Systems Transformation in the Age of COVID-19:**

### **Nutrition:**

A nutritious diet provides a diverse mix of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and protein (plant and humanely-raised animal sources), nuts, and seeds while, at the same time, limits highly-processed food products, sodium, added sugars, red meat, and artificial additives. Together, these dietary patterns lead to healthy people with stronger immune systems. Healthy and strong bodies are better able to fight off disease and contribute to collective wellbeing, which are strong assets during a crisis such as the current COVID-19 pandemic.

- 1) **Emergency Feeding Contracts:**<sup>3</sup> Public food programs, particularly when operating under emergency conditions, tend to rely on shelf-stable and highly processed food products for their longer shelf-life and ease of use. NYC should identify supplementary and cost-effective procurement channels that provide additional sources of nutrient-dense foods that are fresh, minimally processed, delicious, and culturally-relevant for these programs.
- 2) **Infrastructure and Food as a Driver of Health Equity:** While highly processed food products are low cost at the point of purchase, fairly simple to prepare/reheat, and readily available, these products are a poor source of good nutrition. We pay a huge cost for our over-consumption of them in terms of disease, early mortality and planetary damage. To ramp up the infusion of nutrient-dense foods into the City's emergency feeding stream, NYC and NYS should invest in food preparation-related infrastructure that supports staff and volunteers to prepare and deliver fresh and more minimally processed foods to more residents. Additionally, NYC emergency home-delivered meals have been found to contain high amounts of sodium, for example, and, while meeting the NYC Food Standards, exceed the American Heart Association's recommendations of no more than 1,500 mg of sodium per day for meals for seniors and other adults with underlying health issues, such as hypertension. As a basic health equity action, NYC emergency meals for seniors and others with underlying health issues should meet this standard.

### **Local Economies:**

Shorter supply chains are more resilient to global economic shocks, environmental crises, and pandemics. Community health is further ensured when economic and community wealth building opportunities are deliberately invested in. During COVID-19, NYC has taken extraordinary steps to ensure food-insecure New Yorkers are fed. Significant steps have also been taken to meet the large scale, immediate needs by connecting with local food suppliers and delivering excess supplies of food with those who need it most. This work of the NYC government has exemplified what is possible when there is will and innovative thinking applied to what previously felt like insurmountable problems. However, there are still structural challenges that our local and regional food systems are facing, and NYC and NYS have a unique opportunity to both learn from this experience and to address these challenges.

- 1) **Emergency Feeding Contracts:** NYC should release additional emergency feeding solicitations with preferences given to small and mid-sized vendors, with a focus on historically disenfranchised food businesses – particularly Black, Latinx, and Indigenous farmers, producers, processors, distributors, and chefs. Given that access to capital and other resources that make businesses viable and able to compete are less readily available for these businesses, NYC should offer dedicated technical assistance to and dedicate funds for these prospective vendors to ensure they have access to the necessary capital which would afford them the opportunity to help meet the City's food needs and remain financially viable. NYC should create a directory, similar to the NYC Food Supply Match, to create direct connections between funding sources and vendors in financial need.

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<sup>3</sup> Our working assumption is that, if not in the **Emergency Feeding Contract** itself, then the appropriate solicitation used to generate the **Contract**, will specify the conditions under which the foods have been grown/produced and/or carry the food attributes sought. This understanding applies to all '**Emergency Feeding Contract**' recommendations listed in the five value areas cited in this document.

- 2) **Infrastructure:** Situated between two bountiful regional food systems, NYC and NYS enjoy ready access to seasonal foods grown by small- and mid-scale farmers/producers who can, when strategically tapped, meet more of the varied nutrition and cultural needs of New Yorkers than in the past. NYC and NYS must invest in two types of infrastructure: (1) Food Transportation: road, rail and/or waterway to connect regional growers to institutional markets, CSA's and other food outlets; and (2) Food Preparation: including, but not limited to, food hubs, aggregation & storage facilities, and kitchen & food preparation sites. The City & State, working collaboratively with advocates, should publish a comprehensive step-by-step plan, no later than September 1, 2020, as to how these infrastructural components will be developed.
- 3) **Expansion of Hyperlocal Emergency Feeding 'Zone' Model:** NYC should expand on the 'zone' model concept in order to leverage a regional multiplier effect that can increase in farm viability of NYS farmers/producers through food procurement and hyperlocal job creation of chefs and food service providers to prepare healthy, culturally relevant meals in targeted communities during the COVID-19 crisis not met by other existing emergency feeding models. NYC should connect with proven nonprofit organizations to provide the City with technical assistance and leverage existing infrastructure in order to better connect to small-mid scale stakeholders in the local food supply chain and high need communities.

### **Valued Workforce:**

This pandemic has further illuminated that there is a direct through line between the health and well-being of workers along the food chain and the stability of our food supply. Frontline food workers have always been essential and their working conditions have remained unacceptable. They've long been denied livable wages, safe working conditions, access to healthcare, and paid sick days. It is no surprise that in this moment of crisis, the government and corporate response to protect workers has been insufficient. Frontline workers throughout the food-supply chain – most of whom are people of color, women, and immigrants – have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. Farm labor and meatpacking workers, in particular, continue to see high rates of illness and deaths from exposure to COVID-19 on the job. Currently, there are no federal health and safety protections for workers, making it even more difficult for workers to protect themselves or to hold employers accountable. Moving forward, we must ensure that we invest our public dollars in those suppliers that are providing safe and healthy working conditions and fair compensation and, by extension, protecting the health and well-being of all members of our society.

- 1) **Emergency Feeding Contracts:** On this front, NYC should exclusively contract with vendors who offer worker benefits that include paid sick leave, overtime and premium pay, and enforceable health and safety workplace standards. These vendors should ensure that all benefits are available to all workers, regardless of immigration status both during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 2) **Transparency:** It is instrumental to NYC's implementation of the Good Food Purchasing Program that the NYC-GFPP Coalition and broader community know what vendors and suppliers are in our institutional supply chains to best support ongoing shifts towards good food purchasing. NYC should institute transparency mechanisms that give the public information on all City emergency feeding contracts and associated vendors/suppliers. Beyond the emergency feeding contracts, we must create online, public access to a list of all current food vendors and suppliers for food-serving public agencies as well as bidding and contracting information. Additionally, we also need mechanisms for public participation in implementation, including an advisory council that plays a key role in recommending prospective and evaluating current vendors/suppliers.
- 3) **Meatpacking Companies:** The top 5 meatpacking companies in the United States of America – JBS-USA, Cargill, Tyson, Smithfield, and Jennie-O – are suppliers within the NYC food supply chains. These companies have consistently been negligent in protecting the health and safety of workers as seen in their high rate of labor violations. During this pandemic, their negligence has contributed to 25,523 meatpacking workers testing

positive for COVID-19 and at least 89 meatpacking workers having died<sup>4</sup>. The GFPP valued workforce standards encourage institutional buyers to cancel contracts if companies cannot prove they have addressed and will no longer commit repeated labor violations. Given that transparency is an integral component to ensuring the success of GFPP, NYC should publicly track outreach to violators and release any responses received from these 5 companies, and any others, regarding their repeated labor violations.

### **Animal Welfare:**

Animal welfare is critical not only for farmed animals themselves, but also for creating a safer and healthier food system. However, millions of chickens, pigs, and cattle are suffering from increased crowding and welfare problems tied to excessive growth during processing backlogs, or being killed inhumanely and prematurely because of an oversupply of animals, the closing of numerous slaughterhouses, and a decline in institutional purchasing following the closing of schools and restaurants.

- 1) **Emergency Feeding Contracts:** Emergency feeding contracts should prioritize producers of plant foods, as well as welfare-certified meat and other animal products, to ensure that NYC can continue providing residents with quality food throughout this pandemic and beyond. NYC should ensure that any animal products sourced are independently certified as originating from supply chains using high-welfare practices. We also assert that these contracts should not benefit CAFOs (concentrated animal feeding operations).
- 2) **Protein Balancing and Total Animal Numbers:** In addition to prioritizing plant and animal welfare-certified animal products, NYC should increase institutional purchasing of plant foods, beginning with requiring at least 5% of all meals to be free of meat, dairy and eggs by 2021. Additionally, the city must procure animal products in such a way as to not increase the overall numbers of animals raised for food. Any calculation of ‘animal welfare’ must not allow for an overall increase in the number of animals sourced or relied on when taking into account the size of the animal and the volume of the animal products sourced. Reducing the number of animals raised for food would ultimately enhance animal welfare.

### **Environmental Sustainability:**

Reducing overall animal products sourced, and ensuring those that remain in the NYC supply chain originate from more sustainable conditions, will protect wildlife habitat, conserve water and clean air, protect our climate, and foster biodiversity for a healthy environment that protects the wellbeing of our communities. With over 70% of antibiotics being used in animal agriculture, reduction of reliance on animal products will also reduce the risk of antibiotic resistant disease. Additionally, mounting evidence shows that deforestation, habitat loss, industrial livestock operations, and climate change make bridges of disease from wildlife to humans more likely.

- 1) **Emergency Feeding Contracts:** NYC should source foods with a lower carbon footprint, particularly plant foods, and incentivize vendors that source from farmers that use climate-friendly farming practices and have adopted soil health practices, such as those verified by third-party certification. These measures would ensure that NYC is proactively fending off continued climate catastrophe and these shifts would also protect water quality for both NYC and neighboring communities.
- 2) **Supporting Farmers & Preserving Land:** As part of its watershed protection program, and recognizing the fact that crops, especially perennial crops, generally contribute less to water pollution than animal agriculture, NYC should use its watershed protection authority and funds to promote shifting farms in the watershed away from animal agriculture to crops or otherwise preserve lands for habitat, climate, and water quality protection.

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<sup>4</sup> [Mapping COVID-19 outbreaks in the food system](#); Figures as of June 8, 2020  
June 2020