

DUTCHESS COUNTY COMMUNITY FOOD SECURITY ASSESSMENT FINAL REPORT

DECEMBER 2025



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INTRODUCTION

This report was commissioned by Dutchess County, New York's Department of Community and Family Services (DCFS). The purpose of this project was to conduct a comprehensive community food security assessment to evaluate the current state of the local food system, as it relates to food and nutrition insecurity, and identify opportunities for strengthening food access. Amy Haynes LLC was selected as the consulting firm to lead the project through an open request for proposals process in April 2025. In collaboration with the Dutchess County Food Council, the cross-functional consulting team, including Kelsey Kinderknecht and Baz Perry, analyzed relevant data on food insecurity and the local food system, gathered extensive stakeholder feedback through interviews, site visits, and focus groups, synthesized key themes, and crafted this report.

The 6-month research project was collaborative and inclusive, engaging a wide variety of diverse stakeholders acknowledged below. This report presents an outside perspective on the needs and opportunities related to food insecurity in Dutchess County, New York. The findings of the report will help inform and guide the Dutchess County Food Council in developing a comprehensive strategy and plan to increase food security for Dutchess County.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The following organizations provided invaluable contributions and data to inform the findings of this report. Our consulting team wishes to extend gratitude for the many leaders and organizations across Dutchess County that are working tirelessly to eradicate food insecurity.

- Dutchess County Department of Child and Family Services
 - > Office of Aging
 - > Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Department
 - > Hudson River Lodging Homeless Shelter
- Dutchess County Department of Health
- Dutchess County Planning and Development Department
- Poughkeepsie Children’s Cabinet
- Dutchess Outreach
- North East Community Center
- Dutchess County Food Council
- Camino el Exito
- Hope on a Mission
- Poughkeepsie Farm Project
- Vassar College
- United Way of Orange and Dutchess County
- Pawling Resource Center
- Dutchess County Emergency Food Pantry Coalition
- Tri-Corner Nutrition Security Coalition
- Dutchess Community College Food Pantry
- Tri-Corner FEED
- St. Thomas Church of Amenia
- Tenmile Farm Foundation
- Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York
- Dutchess County Agricultural Navigator
- Cornell Cooperative Extension Farm to School Program

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Dutchess County, New York faces rising food insecurity driven by economic pressures, reduced federal funding, access barriers, and untapped potential for cross-system coordination throughout its emergency food system. This report outlines three priority recommendations: increasing county-wide coordination & communication through dedicated staff support, strengthening food rescue and regional procurement systems, and expanding accessibility and best practices across the pantry network. Together, these strategies increase organizational capacity, reduce supply gaps, improve client experience, and expand the reach of services across the county to improve food security. Implementing these recommendations will build a more resilient, coordinated, and equitable food access system that better meets the needs of Dutchess County residents.



BACKGROUND & HISTORY

In 2024, our County Executive launched the Dutchess County Food Security Council, bringing the right people to the table to provide guidance to policy makers on how best to address hunger and improve access to healthy, locally grown food for all County residents. On May 7th, 2024, the Council held its inaugural meeting and established four goals:

1. Understand and measure food insecurity in Dutchess County and the root causes, scale of the problem, and barriers to progress.
2. Reduce food waste in Dutchess County.
3. Maximize food procurement opportunities.
4. Suggest policies for Dutchess County to effectively reduce food insecurity.

These goals are aimed at expanding and leveraging existing supports, assets, infrastructure, and investments established by Dutchess County to respond to food insecurity needs across the County during the COVID-19 epidemic. In 2020 the Dutchess County Executive Office launched the Dutchess Responds Food Connection, a collaboration between Dutchess Outreach, Community Action Partnership for Dutchess County, and the Dutchess County Department of Planning and Development. This collaboration resulted in stronger connections between food resources and the broader community throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and delivered more than 10,000 meals to local families in less than two months. In addition to the Dutchess Responds Food Connection, the County responded to critical food needs through the Dutchess County's Office for the Aging, delivering a record number of home-delivered meals to Seniors.

In the fall of 2025, as this food security assessment was in progress, a federal shutdown froze Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits for 11,000 households in Dutchess County. The County Executive Office responded to this food crisis through a commitment of up to \$1.5 million in funds to support local food pantries to assist County residents who receive SNAP benefits.

Dutchess County's Executive Sue Serino shared, "I have been working in close coordination with our Food Security Council, and our commitment of \$150,000 a week is realistic, manageable, and exactly what the food pantries have told us they need to fulfill their critical mission. Hunger is a human issue and no one should go hungry because of politics. I'm proud to say, however, that we in Dutchess County remain committed to standing by our neighbors."

Additionally, the County partnered with the Community Foundation of the Hudson Valley to reactivate its "Dutchess Responds" fund for those wishing to support local food pantries providing food to households impacted by the Federal government shutdown and freeze and reduction of SNAP benefits. County Executive Serino urged residents and businesses, who are able, to consider making monetary donations to local food pantries.

The Dutchess County Food Security Council plans to leverage this established infrastructure in the development of future strategies to improve food security for Dutchess County in the years to come.

FOOD INSECURITY IN DUTCHESS COUNTY

Food insecurity, defined as uncertainty of having or unable to acquire enough food to meet one's needs due to insufficient money or other resources for food, is an important social determinant of health that negatively influences population health and well-being (Rabbitt et al., 2025). When using the validated USDA 18-item food insecurity scale that most reliably measures all dimensions of food insecurity, **10.8% of households and 20.5% of adults in Dutchess County were experiencing food insecurity in 2021** (Expanded BRFSS, 2021); this translates to roughly 60,000 people being food insecure based on the county population which was 115,529 households (297,150 people) in 2023 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023).

These county rates do not differ drastically from the rates of surrounding counties (Expanded BRFSS, 2021); however, there are disproportionately higher rates of food insecurity for specific populations such as being female, age 25-44 years old, Black, non-Hispanic and Hispanic, <\$50,000 annual household income, unemployed, less than a high school education, college students, or those seeking mental health services (Rabbitt et al., 2024). When examining the demographics of Dutchess County, the majority (67.5%) of the population identifies as non-Hispanic White, with 10.5% non-Hispanic Black and 15.9% Hispanic; 31.7% of the population lives in a rural area with low population density, ~20% of the population are 65 years and older, and ~20% of children live in single parent households (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). Relating to socioeconomic status, 38% of households

earn more than the federal poverty level but less than the basic cost of living for the county; these individuals are categorized as ALICE (asset limited, income constrained, employed) and are more likely to be food insecure. Specific to children, 37% of children are eligible for free and reduced price meals in the County, which means these children live in households with income $\leq 185\%$ of the federal poverty level. Relating to health and chronic disease, the Dutchess County Community Health Assessment found that 9.1% of adults in the county are diagnosed with diabetes, 12.7% with prediabetes, and 7.2% with cardiovascular disease (Expanded BRFSS, 2021). Under-resourced neighborhood food environments also contribute significantly to both higher rates of food insecurity and greater burden of diet-related chronic diseases (Odoms-Young et al., 2024).

There are a variety of additional data sources for food insecurity rates in Dutchess County in addition to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey (BRFSS). These sources include the Siena Survey, Mid-Hudson Region Community



20.5% of adults in Dutchess County
were experiencing food insecurity in 2021

Health Assessment, Feeding America Map the Meal Gap, Dutchess County Community Health Assessment, Poughkeepsie Choice Needs Assessment Survey Findings, and the Hope Center #RealCollege Survey Report. With these various sources, there is a range of rates due to different measures and time frames used and variable sampling approaches. According to Feeding America Map the Meal Gap, 10.8% of households were food insecure in 2023. This estimate is less than the Expanded BRFSS data source likely due to not measuring food insecurity directly; rather, Map the Meal Gap utilizes data on other social determinants from the U.S. Census Bureau Community Population Survey to estimate rates of food insecurity. In a survey of students at Dutchess Community College in 2021, 42% of respondents had been experiencing food insecurity in the past 30 days, 44% experiencing housing insecurity in the past 30 days, and 17% experienced homelessness in the past year. Among these students at Dutchess Community College who reported food insecurity, 16% were utilizing SNAP benefits. A qualitative study completed at the Dutchess Community College food pantry found that food affordability and rising food costs is contributing to food insecurity. Some students reported that the stress of not having enough food was affecting their school performance. A resident needs assessment in Poughkeepsie with a 70% response rate of all residents in the two housing complexes found that 38% of respondents living at Thurgood Marshall Terrace and 35% of respondents living at Martin Luther King Jr. Garden Apartments reported experiencing food insecurity (Poughkeepsie Choice Needs Assessment Survey Findings). From the Dutchess County Stabilization Center, 48.3% (783/1620) screened positive for food insecurity

concerns across various zip codes in the area among those accessing the Stabilization Center. From United Way's community survey, 56.6% were worried food would run out before they could buy more. For the use of SNAP, 9% of households reported receiving SNAP in 2022, less than both the national rate of 12% and state rate of 11%. Rates in the mid-Hudson region varied with Sullivan county reporting a rate of 16% and Putnam county a rate of 4% ([Mid-Hudson Region Community Health Survey](#)).

Due to the varied rates of experiences of food insecurity, building a more robust and reliable data system about the food insecure population by collecting data on more specific experiences of individuals experiencing food insecurity, in addition

to focusing on prevalence, would help inform how the county intervenes to improve food security. In order to better understand the state of food insecurity in the county, additional information on what supports those with food insecurity are getting and what they aren't getting would give clarity on how to better support these individuals and households. Two examples of innovation in measuring food insecurity include communities in San Diego and Minnesota:

Rather than relying on the typical measurement of food insecurity which is either categorized into 3 (food secure, low, very low) or dichotomized (food insecure, food secure), Second Harvest Heartland in Minnesota has developed a 4 category definition of food insecurity (Second Harvest Heartland, 2025):

INTRODUCING THE HUNGER CONTINUUM



Source: Second Harvest Heartland



FOOD INSECURE

- 1 **No help:** Do not have enough food, not receiving grocery help
- 2 **Some help:** Receiving grocery help but do not have enough food
- 3 **Enough help, still not food secure:** With support, able to get enough food for today

FOOD SECURE

- 4 **No need for help, have enough food:** Able to purchase enough groceries without assistance

The advantages of this type of measurement is that it allows for more understanding of the root causes of food insecurity and what can be done to improve it. By understanding how individuals are receiving or not receiving support can help inform

how to intervene among those experiencing food insecurity. Additionally, San Diego has developed a [robust dashboard](#) with a combination of different data sources and metrics that extend beyond food insecurity (San Diego Hunger Coalition, 2025).

Yet, despite the gaps in data, there is much work, dedication, and persistence to develop innovative approaches to improve food insecurity in the County. As a few examples, North East Community Center, which led the formation of Tri-Corner Nutrition Security Coalition, conducted a yearlong feasibility study to develop a fair pricing model (i.e. buy food directly from farmers at a fair price and offer it to community members at a sliding scale) and conducted a 17 week pilot study on the project. Tri-Corner FEED organization in Millerton, New York developed a sliding scale farm stand model to connect farmers with residents. Another initiative, Fit Dutchess, has been focusing on school interventions

for policy, systems, and environmental approaches to improving food insecurity.

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DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS OVERVIEW



We used a variety of data collection tools (both qualitative and quantitative) to answer the learning questions guiding this project, which were informed through collaboration and iteration with the Dutchess County Food Council.

LEARNING QUESTIONS

- ? **Roles:** What is the best role for the County to play to help improve food insecurity? (and other key stakeholder groups - support, lead, etc.)
- ? **What's happening:** How do we leverage existing initiatives and resources to improve food security?
- ? **Innovation/what's next:** What are potential new strategies and collaborative structures that the County could implement to improve food insecurity?
- ? **Understand needs of high risk populations experiencing food insecurity:** What are the nuanced needs and desires of food insecure households and individuals across Dutchess County related to diet-related health conditions?
- ? **Financial investments needed:** Where do we invest in the food supply chain to meaningfully grow the Dutchess County local food system?

To answer these questions, we conducted 3 focus groups, 15 individual interviews with clients, 34 key informant individual interviews, 12 site visits and observations at food security programs across the county, and developed food access maps to explore the neighborhood food environment throughout the county (see Appendix A for Data Collection Plan with more detail). We also completed a document review of all relevant reports that key stakeholders recommended based on the current work already happening in Dutchess County that is focused on food insecurity (see Appendix C literature and document review for examples) and the role of the local and regional food system.

To fill additional gaps in knowledge, we conducted a survey among the food pantry sites (n=20) to better understand how to meet food pantries' needs so that they can better serve clients in the county with a response rate of 36%. This variety of data modalities allowed us to use a triangulation of data in the analysis process to more fully answer the questions from different perspectives. Together, we sought to understand perspectives to inform recommendations that were rooted in the experiences of both those working in the county to prevent and mitigate food insecurity, and for those experiencing food insecurity.

As a team, we familiarized ourselves with the data and used analytic mapping techniques to identify patterns across the data which informed our theme development process. Our results from this analysis are embedded within 'supporting data and specific examples' Table in the Community Needs Assessment with Gap Analysis.

The survey was distributed to 32 pantries, together, representing all regions within the county. Twenty pantries completed the survey (response rate 62.5%). Because survey responses were anonymous, we do not know which pantries responded and which regions were represented/not represented in the sample; however, the high response rate suggests that the findings, although not generalizable to every pantry's experience in the county, are applicable to the pantry experience within the county and can be used for further inquiry.

OPERATION DETAILS OF PANTRIES

Among the 20 food pantries who responded to the survey, the majority of pantries have clients come every other week (40%), once a week (20%), or once a month (20%). The number of clients served on a weekly basis ranged from 10 to 800 people with some pantries reporting that they serve upwards of 450 households every week. For operation time, there is

a wide variation in when pantries are open with 20% open all day, 20% open in the morning, and 10% open in the evening. Other pantries reported opening for a 2 or 4 hour window of time on certain days of the week. About half of the pantries have eligibility requirements for clients, which are mostly geographic requirements (i.e. serving clients only from certain zip codes or requiring clients to participate in other federal food assistance programs). For types of services offered, 35% of the pantries report offering home delivery, 70% of the pantries offer in-person shopping, and none of the pantries offer online ordering. Most pantries operate a choice shopping model (55%) and the rest of the pantries offer food with modified choice where clients are able to choose some items and other items are prepacked. Half of the pantries offer wrap-around services; these services include: case management, rental assistance, utility assistance, referrals to other services, clothing in the winter (coat drive), and the SEA (Self Employment Assistance) program.

SOURCING

When asked specific questions about sourcing food, the majority of pantries (70%) experienced challenges with food sourcing in the past year. Pantries associate these challenges with higher prices, government cuts, loss of grant funds, procurement challenges with fresh produce, and less donations from grocery stores and in-kind from the public. Food pantries also express difficulty sourcing food from the Regional Food Bank due to higher prices, less stock and small selection, and limited healthy, culturally relevant options. 48% of food pantries report experiencing a loss of grant support to purchase local food. Due to this, pantries are relying more on donations from the public, churches, and from grocery stores, and

Results from the Food Pantry Survey (n=20, response rate 62.5%)

have less funds available to purchase food from local farmers.

Pantries report that the easiest items to source are shelf stable food items and produce. The most difficult items to source are culturally relevant food and foods that cater to specific health needs of the population (e.g. low-sodium, low-sugar, gluten-free). The most common diet related health challenges facing pantry clients are cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and prediabetes.

DISTRIBUTION AND STORAGE

For distributing food, 40% of food pantries report needing logistics support, specifically needing support with transportation, either a vehicle to transport or other needs to make the vehicle run smoothly (i.e. money to pay the driver or a coordinator to manage the distributions). Most pantries report that a centralized communication system to share food would be helpful (58%), although 26% report that this is not a need. One pantry reported that enhancing the current communication network, rather than replacing it, is a need and another shared that there may need to be a system that is more specific than county-wide to coordinate food distributions. For storage, the majority of pantries (60%) don't have a need for a shared, central space to store food, specifically with cold storage; however, 40% did report this is a need. This seems to be a need especially in the summer when the weather is warm and pantries need more space to store the fresh produce properly.

DATA	IMPLICATION
512 out of 620 (83%) sell < \$100k per year	Dutchess County agriculture is dominated by small farms. At this scale, gross sales rarely cover operating costs, meaning most farms cannot provide a living wage without off-farm income.
Average Farm Income: -\$23,682	On average, farms operate at a loss even with subsidies. Raising prices to break even would make their products uncompetitive in the regional marketplace.
Crops grown: all major categories (except tobacco, cotton; limited aquaculture/pork data available)	Dutchess has broad production capability and diverse experience, offering many possible expansion paths for food access initiatives.
Vegetable acreage: was 1,044 acres in 2017, reduced to 344 in 2022 (0.3% of 99,652 total)	Despite large cropland area, vegetable production – critical for nutrient-dense food access – is modest. Increasing supply for local food access likely requires acreage shifts or regional sourcing.
Farmer age distribution: 190 <35, 656 age 35–64, 491 >65	A strong base of young and mid-career farmers supports long-term agricultural continuity if market opportunities improve.
Beginning farmers: 492 (36% of all 1,337 producers)	High rates of new entrants suggest interest in farming, entrepreneurship, and values-driven production.
Dutchess share of NYS production: ~1%	Larger, lower-cost farms in western and southern NY supply much of the state. Regional procurement will remain essential for meeting food access needs at scale.

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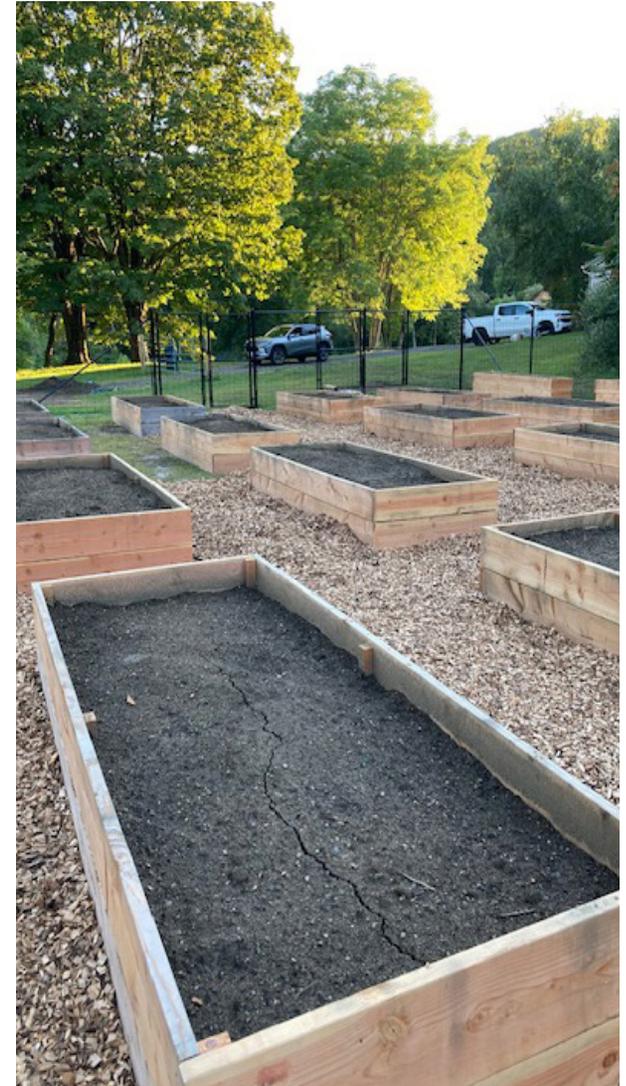
SUMMARY ON THE LOCAL AND REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM

Dutchess County's food system combines a productive agricultural sector with an expanding local-food movement. Many farmers are early-career or working-age with long productive horizons. Yet despite agricultural diversity and rising output, most farms face high production costs and low margins. Many require off-farm income to remain viable, creating a disconnect between agricultural abundance, farmer well-being, and the affordability of local food. This tension shapes the county's food security challenges.

Dutchess farms vary widely by size and production type. While there is significant land, including forage and row-crop acreage that could shift into fruit, vegetable, or mixed livestock production, small farms face constraints common to high-cost counties. To align farm capacity with food access goals, farmers must be included early in the planning process (ideally in winter months, with compensation).

KEY BARRIERS INCLUDE:

- **High production costs and market pressures:** Labor and land costs push farms toward higher-margin wholesale and direct-to-consumer channels. Prices required for cost recovery often exceed what emergency food providers can pay, especially when compared to the expected pricing of subsidized food bank products. Value-based procurement models will require funders to understand paying higher prices for local impact.
- **Limited aggregation and distribution infrastructure:** Small and midsize farms rarely have the scale to supply pantries or meal programs independently. Shared aggregation, crop planning, and distribution systems reduce costs and increase consistency, but require multi-year concessional investment and coordinated participation led by farmers invested in working together.
- **Insufficient cold storage and transport capacity:** Both farms and emergency food providers lack adequate refrigerated transport and storage, limiting the ability to handle perishable foods or scale donations. Small farms often rely on personal vehicles, making timing and scale challenging without additional infrastructure.
- **Inadequate funding for local-food purchasing:** Current incentives, such as New York's farm donation tax credit (25% of wholesale value, up to \$5,000/year), are too small to motivate donations from most farms. Programs offering market-rate purchasing — such as Nourish NY, the recently completed Local Food Purchasing Assistance program, and Farm to School — have been more effective at channeling NY-grown food into emergency food systems. Through the challenges of LFPA, it became clear that in order to pivot their crop planning and distribution channels towards emergency food programs, farms need advanced notice and assurance that their purchases will be sustained.



IMPLICATIONS FOR FOOD SECURITY PLANNING

- Several Dutchess farms — including Rock Steady Farm, Poughkeepsie Farm Project, Catalyst Collaborative Farm, and producers partnering with the Northeast Community Center — already contribute significantly to food access. These models demonstrate what is possible with stable partnerships and funding.
- The region has strong overall farm capacity (hundreds of farms, tens of millions in sales), but much of this production does not yet flow into food-access channels.
- Agricultural districts and land easements protect farmland long-term and there are beginning farmers entering the profession in the County, allowing for planning of aggregation hubs, cold storage, or other infrastructure with confidence that agricultural use will continue.
- Because Dutchess is primarily a small-farm county, scalable food access strategies will depend on aggregation, cooperative marketing, or shared logistics.

PROVEN MODELS TO EXPAND IN DUTCHESS COUNTY

- **Sliding-scale CSAs or farm-share programs**, where higher-income members subsidize low-income participants. Expansion requires stable subsidy, sponsorship, or community fundraising.
- **Subsidized direct-to-consumer purchasing**, such as vouchers, produce stipends, or debit-style benefits that allow residents to buy directly from farms.
- **Farm-pantry purchasing partnerships**, providing guaranteed payment (usually at wholesale prices) and reliable volumes for pantries. Long-term contracts and ideally an escrow or endowment are necessary for farms to plan production acreage 1–2 seasons in advance and forgo other market opportunities.
- **Coordinated aggregation and hub-and-spoke distribution**, enabling small farms to pool volume and meet consistency requirements of food access programs.
- **Food rescue and surplus recovery**, expanded through improved cold storage, volunteer coordination, gleaning programs, and access to processing kitchens. While much surplus comes from grocers and institutions, farms can contribute through gleaning and donating unsold produce at markets.

Local farms and distributors have substantial potential to contribute more directly to feeding low-income residents through sliding-scale programs, subsidized sales, and structured partnerships with emergency food providers. Realizing this potential requires coordinated planning built upon trusted partnerships with and between farmers, strategic investment in infrastructure, and policies and sustained funding levels that support both farm viability and equitable access to healthy food.



COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT WITH GAP ANALYSIS

Based on our data collection process and analysis, the following gaps and needs have been identified for improving food security in Dutchess County. Our assessment includes analyzing food access and food equity trends across the County. Our team emphasized collecting data related to vulnerable populations at higher risk for food insecurity and engaging people with lived experience of food insecurity and close key informants who have deep experience working on the issue of food insecurity in Dutchess County.

GAP 1	DIMINISHED FOOD SUPPLY AT LOCAL PANTRIES
GAP 2	LACK OF LOGISTICS SUPPORT FOR LOCAL PANTRY PARTNERS
GAP 3	NEED FOR BEST PRACTICE MODELS IN EXPANDING ACCESS AND ENSURE DIGNITY
GAP 4	LACK OF AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE FOR WHERE TO GET HELP AND EXPRESSED A NEED FOR HOLISTIC SUPPORT TO ADDRESS HEALTH-RELATED SOCIAL NEEDS
GAP 5	LACK OF ROBUST DATA ON FOOD INSECURITY WITHIN THE COUNTY AND LACK OF DATA ON WHAT THE NEEDS ARE FOR THESE HOUSEHOLDS

GAP 1

DIMINISHED FOOD SUPPLY AT LOCAL PANTRIES

THE GAP	THE NEED	SUPPORTING DATA & SPECIFIC EXAMPLES
<p>Diminished food supply at local pantries: Most food pantries reported not having enough food, that the regional food bank has less food available due to budget cuts. Additionally, the New York LFPA (USDA Local Food Purchasing Agreement)—providing local nonprofits with grant money to buy directly from local farms) programs are ending this year, which will result in a loss of funding for pantries to purchase directly from local farms and producers. These programs were a big success locally and losing this infrastructure and support will be a significant setback.</p>	<p>Additional funding and grant support to continue to support local food procurement within the County.</p>	<p>Camino: Camino is partnering with local farms through a Cornell Cooperative Extension grant, but that grant is ending, so there is concern about how to continue sourcing food locally with the loss of this financial support.</p> <p>North East Community Center: The New York Farms for New York Families program is ending and has provided North East Community Center with an abundance of fresh produce from local farms that clients rave about. It would be a shame to lose this successful infrastructure.</p> <p>Poughkeepsie Farm Project:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The Co-Executive Director and Director of Education shared that their organization distributes fresh, healthy food grown on their 15 acre farm (leased from Vassar College) into the community through a network of 14 community partners, including local schools (Clinton Elementary School) and nonprofits and churches that offer food distributions (Dutchess Outreach). They offer a subsidized, sliding scale CSA program (539 shares/households per season) reaching about 300-500 people. 2) They shared how they are at capacity, yet there is interest in expanding by purchasing land and making it a community land trust. They would like to add value-added food in time as a revenue stream and food sovereignty strategy and would like to increase food production during the winter. <p>Tenmile Farm Foundation: Staff shared the desire to continue expanding their production and distribution capacity to local partners. They recently expanded their greenhouse production, which has been a big success, and they would like to continue to expand in the years to come.</p>

GAP 2

LACK OF LOGISTICS SUPPORT FOR LOCAL PANTRY PARTNERS

THE GAP	THE NEED	SUPPORTING DATA & SPECIFIC EXAMPLES
<p>Lack of logistics support for local pantry partners:</p> <p>1) Pantries are in need of a shared space to store food, specifically with cold storage. Currently, there is no central location to store and receive food; this places a burden on volunteers and food pantry staff to scramble to find storage solutions when they have a surplus of food.</p> <p>2) Pantries need support to coordinate food distribution across partners in the county. One solution shared was a potential text messaging system, such that texts would be sent when food, and specific types of food, are available.</p>	<p>Identify/build/designate a cold food storage facility for food that can be used by the network of food pantries and distribution sites across the County.</p> <p>Develop a communication strategy for food pantry partners to be notified of availability of specific types of food.</p>	<p>Emergency Food Pantry Coalition:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) During the focus group, the Coalition discussed the need for a text message system—something simple—so people can communicate about sharing food. The Coalition is already trying to coordinate together as pantries to share food with one another, but it can be difficult to reach each other in the moment. A centralized communication system would help this process. 2) The Coalition recommended a logistics coordinator who can support this communication strategy, similar to a clearinghouse: a communal warehouse space/storage facility would be helpful. Sharing a common software platform for statistics (talked about Service Insights) would be an improvement to see how many are served. 3) Coalition members shared that more volunteers are needed to pick up food, for example, at the regional food bank. <p>North East Community Center: County level planning is needed across food system players. It can be challenging to coordinate food logistics across multiple partners. Some local food distributions are in need of more food. We try to supply them when we can.</p>

NEED FOR BEST PRACTICE MODELS IN EXPANDING ACCESS AND ENSURE DIGNITY

THE GAP	THE NEED	SUPPORTING DATA & SPECIFIC EXAMPLES
<p>A need for best practice models in expanding access and ensure dignity.</p> <p>Many pantries operate during the workday (9am-5pm), when working adults are unable to get to food distributions. Many pantries (45%) throughout the County do not offer a choice shopping model, i.e. opportunities for clients to shop for their food.</p> <p>A barrier in access is that clients want to shop for their food and are looking for a variety of nutritious options (healthy meals and produce are desirable) versus a box of food. Experiences of stigma and shame, especially among the college student population, turn clients away from seeking support. Many clients discussed not being able to get enough food at food distributions</p>	<p>Develop best practice models for daily operations at food distribution sites to ensure experiences of dignity and choice among clients.</p> <p>Increase capacity at food distribution sites by improving procurement strategies to ensure sufficient, culturally responsive food options that meet specific health-related food needs and preferences.</p>	<p>Food Pantry Client Food Group:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) One client shared that families are struggling to get enough food and often need to go to several pantries for help. 2) Another client shared that there is a need for more affordable housing. Section 8 is closed. One man is living at the Red Roof Inn with his family of 5 and wonders why abandoned historic buildings in Poughkeepsie can't be renovated for affordable housing. 3) One client discussed domestic violence and how this is a common experience among women who need help. 4) Fresh veggies and fruit is a highlight and a big need for people's diets. Prepared salads and healthy meals-to-go would be nice. One man is diabetic and needs low sugar items. A food truck would be great to get to places with high-need in rural areas. <p>Pawling Food Distribution (Camino al Exito): The team shared that there needs to be a Best Practice Model in food distribution sites to ensure that clients feel safe and welcome. The Camino team offers that culture and environment. They started the food distribution a year ago and the number has grown from 14 families to 109 every week. They have a What's App group that reaches 900 families.</p> <p>Tenmile Farm Foundation: Staff shared the need to have a best practices model at food pantries so that all pantries operate a food distribution in such a way that ensures clients experience dignity and choice when receiving food.</p> <p>Dutchess Community College Food Pantry: They serve 300-450 households a year of college students (and their families), combining that with workers of the college – they serve about 1,000 people annually. There has been increased usage to the pantry, so they added an extra shopping day a month due to the need: clients can shop 2x a month. College students face a unique challenge in that they are not eligible to apply for SNAP when they purchase a meal plan. Staff also shared that there is a lot of shame and embarrassment with using the pantry that they have had to combat by making it a space of dignity since many clients have had a bad experience at a food pantry in the past.</p>

GAP 4

LACK OF AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE FOR WHERE TO GET HELP AND NEED FOR HOLISTIC SUPPORT

THE GAP	THE NEED	SUPPORTING DATA & SPECIFIC EXAMPLES
<p>People lack awareness and knowledge for where to get help and expressed a need for holistic support to address health-related social needs (housing, transportation, medical support, food). Stakeholders shared that there is a lack of understanding of how to get the help one needs.</p> <p>Families and individuals need help locating affordable housing, accessing SNAP, mental health support, domestic violence support, and other services. There is a need for case management support, i.e. a social worker or coach to help clients apply for and acquire services and resources. Some clients shared poor experiences with support</p>	<p>A well-publicized, centralized referral system and coordination center, staffed with employees trained in trauma-informed practices, could support a wrap-around service approach to servicing clients’ holistic needs and work to overcome the stigma and shame to receive support/services. Our team recommends leveraging 211.</p>	<p>Food Pantry Client Food Group:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Several talked about how food stamps aren’t enough, and they don’t last through the month because of the high cost of food. 2) They talked about having a lack of support. They want someone to teach them. They don’t have family support. 3) Clients talked about the desperate need for affordable housing, specifically subsidized housing <p>Emergency Food Pantry Coalition Focus Group: Most clients can’t work due to illness or disabilities, and they have a very limited income. Some struggle to get SNAP because they make just too much. Many say their SNAP benefits are not enough.</p> <p>North East Community Center and Camino al Exito: Transportation is a huge need. Getting rides—many don’t have a car.</p> <p>Hope on a Mission: Clients often need help filling out paperwork. Many people are illiterate.</p> <p>Dutchess County government workers:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Seasoned county workers representing the Office of Aging, Adult Protective Services, SNAP, and intake program (NY Reconnects) shared the complex challenges people are facing to meet their needs and resistance to getting support due to poor experiences previously: shame and embarrassment with using the pantry, desire to shop on their own, desire for different types of food rather than only canned food. 2) Workers also shared how new work requirements will make it even harder for folks who are in-need to qualify and register for SNAP. The group talked extensively about the overwhelm and stress people are experiencing, making it difficult to follow through on necessary documentation for benefit applications, combined with the fear and lack of trust in government to seek support. <p>Free Farm Stand: One volunteer spoke about how people are “afraid” to come out to the farm stand because they think the food is for someone who needs it more than them (i.e. it’s for somebody else). The volunteer does a lot of educating about what help is out there and drives food to different neighborhoods and affordable housing buildings.</p> <p>Hudson River Lodging Homeless Shelter: Staff shared that there is a need to help people with budgeting, including budgeting with their food stamps.</p>

GAP **5**

LACK OF ROBUST DATA ON FOOD INSECURITY

THE GAP	THE NEED	SUPPORTING DATA & SPECIFIC EXAMPLES
<p>Lack of robust data on food insecurity within the County and lack of data on what the needs are for households experiencing food insecurity.</p>	<p>Develop data systems to capture representative estimates of food insecurity using validated measures, and expand the model of food insecurity to capture the nuances rather than the binary (i.e. are folks experiencing food insecurity getting support? If so, what is working and what is not working? For folks experiencing food insecurity who are not getting support, why not? What would be most helpful?)</p>	<p>Literature/resource review: There are many different data sources either locally within the county and state, or nationally, that captures data related to food insecurity. However, each data source uses a different measurement scale to capture food insecurity, resulting in varied estimates of food insecurity in the County over time. Future efforts should focus on understanding the experiences of support/ barriers to receiving support for households experiencing food insecurity.</p>

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS

From the existing gaps and needs in the community in Dutchess County, we have identified the three most pressing priority areas as recommendations for ways the County can begin to improve food security through a stepwise process of building capacity, infrastructure, and support. Future recommendations can build on these initial recommendations to further address the gaps and needs identified above.

1	
PRIORITY 2	INCREASE FOOD SUPPLY THROUGH ENHANCED RESCUE AND PROCUREMENT PRACTICES
PRIORITY 3	INCREASE ACCESSIBILITY, USE, AND IMPACT OF FOOD PANTRY VISITS

PRIORITY 1

INCREASE COUNTY-WIDE COORDINATION & COMMUNICATION THROUGH DEDICATED STAFF SUPPORT

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

1. Build working groups, goals, and key activities for FY26 for the Dutchess County Food Council.
2. Facilitate ongoing coordination and communication among the many stakeholders within the County.
 - a. Share existing capacity and initiatives to identify and plan geographic, demographic, and other specialities
 - b. Reduce redundancy
 - c. Increase referrals to appropriate services
3. Define local data collection process to better understand food insecurity.
 - a. Use evidence, not assumptions, so that limited resources are appropriately allocated
 - b. Tell the correct story to donors
 - c. Benchmark to be able to assess progress
4. Expand public awareness of available food access supports through a public awareness campaign to effectively communicate support and resources available to community members facing food insecurity. Focus on key institutions (healthcare, schools, etc.) as communication channels.
5. Work with the Hudson Valley 211 Helpline service to run an awareness campaign in buses, laundromats, and other high-visibility locations and make sure that their volunteers are being trained regularly on available pantry and other food access options.

RESOURCES NEEDED & AVAILABLE RESOURCES

Resources Needed:

- Dutchess County Food Council Program Coordinator (part-time) - fractional support to start up working groups; coordinate & communicate with stakeholders; build trust between disparate industries, institutions and individuals; develop & accelerate work plans
- Communication and community outreach plan to expand public awareness of available supports, leveraging the sustained infrastructure of the 211 system
- Ongoing stakeholder education on evolving best practices in food security and food systems policy and programming to drive consistent innovation through pilot programs
- Outreach, relationship building, and compensation for those with the lived experience of food insecurity to participate in building solutions that meet their needs

Available Resources:

- Engaged county and community leadership with 1+ year of experience in the Food Council
- Food pantry coordination work is happening across the County, specifically led by Dutchess Outreach and North East Community Center
- NY Connects
- 211 (United Way)

IMPLEMENTATION COSTS

ITEM	ONE-TIME COST (\$)	ANNUAL RECURRING (\$)	TOTAL 1ST YEAR BUDGET
Program Coordinator — salary & fringe FTE 0.5	\$0	\$40,000	\$40,000
Office equipment (Laptop)	\$1,500	\$0	\$1,500
Outreach materials (printing, web fees)	\$0	\$2,000	\$2,000
211 awareness campaign		\$2,000	\$2,000
Stipends for stakeholder committee participation & expertise (Individuals with lived experience, farmers, North East Community Center’s Tri-Corner Nutrition Security Coalition, Dutchess Outreach, etc)		\$12,000	\$12,000
Organizational overhead (16% for supervision, IT support, accounting support, phone access, desk, parking, workers comp. etc)		\$6,400	\$6,400
Total		\$62,400	\$63,900

STAFF TIME ALLOCATION

- **Workgroup Facilitation** (recruitment, agenda co-creation, scheduling, notetaking) 25%
- **Primary data collection** (surveys, focus groups, stakeholder meetings) 30%
- **Written stakeholder communications** (reports, newsletters, website, social) 30%
- **Professional development** (food system education, scoping national trends and opportunities, communication software and technical skill building) 10%
- **Internal administration** 5%

SKILL BUILDING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Both the Dutchess County Food Council Program Coordinator and the organizational leadership that provides supervision must become experts in their local and regional food system in order to gain a full picture of the opportunities and barriers that new initiatives will encounter and to build a shared vocabulary and understanding with a variety of stakeholders. Two sources of professional development include the Cornell Cooperative Extension Food System Curriculum (contact Laura Biasillo at lw257@cornell.edu) and the LEAD NY program (<https://cals.cornell.edu/global-development/our-work/programs/leadny>). A cohort of food system leaders is available throughout NYS, often gathered by the NYS Health Foundation. Dutchess representatives should engage in this professional network to train themselves in this new role. Further consulting, mentoring, and published resources are available through the Johns Hopkins Food Policy Network program (<https://foodpolicynetworks.org/>) and the Wallace Center’s North American Food Systems Network (<https://foodsystmsnetwork.org/>).

In addition to understanding the food system, developing tools to measure capacity, evaluating progress, and strengthening facilitation skills, this position must serve as a unifying presence who brings together stakeholders with different roles and priorities. The coordinator must ensure that the food council and the initiatives it leads include all voices and recognize that multiple, parallel approaches are required to meet a wide range of community needs. Their collaborators will include government staff, elected officials, school administrators, healthcare providers, farmers and farm businesses, grocers, distributors, restaurants, nonprofits, advocates, the Regional Food Bank, volunteers, small donors, large donors, and most importantly, residents who are experiencing food insecurity. This role requires the maturity to remain in constructive dialogue with all of these groups, including those with whom they may not always agree.

PRIORITY 1

INCREASE COUNTY-WIDE COORDINATION & COMMUNICATION THROUGH DEDICATED STAFF SUPPORT

FEASIBILITY SCORE: 4.05

(1 = very low feasibility, 5 = high).

MEASUREMENT	CONSIDERATIONS	SCORE	WEIGHT	WEIGHTED SCORE
Cost (affordability / funding availability)	Low cost for demonstrated rewards in most communities	4.5	30%	1.35
Operational complexity (logistics, staffing)	Host organization must provide mentorship, communications and IT backbone support, access to funders and accounting systems	4	25%	1
Time to implement (months)	Low barriers to entry. Investment in professional development and networking with retained staff will create long-term expertise	5	10%	0.5
Likelihood of stakeholder buy-in	Quality of hire will determine network development, follow through, leadership towards project implementation	3	10%	0.3
Sustainability (ongoing funding / local supply)	Established positions have predictable costs (COLA adjustments)	4	15%	0.6
Equity impact (benefits marginalized populations)	Second-degree impact by improving food distribution coalition work	3	10%	0.3
Feasibility Score				4.05

IMPACT

- 1. Efficiency:** Identifying needs, opportunities, and redundancy leads to distributed cost savings at stakeholder organizations
- 2. Education of all stakeholders** through written communications, stakeholder conversations, web resources, and timely social media and individual SMS and email to develop knowledge of food system opportunities
- 3. Recruitment:** Increased education, awareness, and outreach increases the number of people involved in food security initiatives. Increased volunteer and

stakeholder coordination retains interested volunteers by directing their energy to productive and fulfilling activities.

- 4. Cross-County Collaboration and Extended Funding Reach:** Participation in statewide food systems network, statewide Food as Medicine Coalition, and other groups provides opportunities for regional programs, which have a higher chance of funding at the state or national level, bringing funds into the county.

PRIORITY **2**

PRIORITY 2: INCREASE FOOD SUPPLY THROUGH ENHANCED RESCUE AND PROCUREMENT PRACTICES

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

1. Fundraise to offer local food purchasing grants and/or contracts with local farms and producers to supply food to the food pantry system on a three to five year timeline (e.g. Poughkeepsie Farm Project is poised to supply fresh produce to schools and pantries). Use these grants to procure more nutritionally dense food items (including fresh fruits, vegetables and eggs) from local and regional farms for distribution through pantries. Seek out minimally processed items for winter months by exploring foods purchased through Farm to School vendors. Contract with farms on a future basis to reserve space in hoop houses for extended-season fresh items.
2. Address infrastructure gaps, including cold storage and transportation throughout the local pantry network, by expanding volunteers using private vehicles and cooling blankets. This pilot program will provide proof that the funding, commitment, supply chain, and pantry client needs are sufficient to expand investment in a future food hub and more professionalized distribution system. It will also provide time for the coordinator to build relationships and have the majority of activity in place before the commitment to running a facility. In 3-5 years, an existing facility should be leased, if possible, to reduce ongoing capital expenditures.
3. Build a food rescue and redistribution program to ensure existing food is rescued and consumed locally. Freely available, edible food represents the lowest cost procurement option for pantries and its redistribution to households before spoilage mimics what the food banking system achieves on a national scale with commodities and shelf stable items. The volunteer system that can be orchestrated to meet this need overlaps with the efforts to distribute local food items and keeps food flowing during periods of lower supply from other sources.
4. Use periods with peak surplus fresh foods to implement pop-up pantries at locations that do not currently have a dedicated pantry space.

RESOURCES NEEDED & AVAILABLE RESOURCES

Resources Needed:

- Logistics support for coordinated food sourcing, purchasing, and distribution (additional to coordination above)
- Secure, sustained funds for local food purchases, raised by a committee or working group that supports the coordinator, with an emphasis on building an endowment from initial large donations
- Enhanced support from the Regional Food Bank (regular Monday pickups: opportunity to shop for items in-person)
- Knowledge of food rescue/food waste diversion strategies gained through peer support from Friendships Donation Network and Seven Valley Health Coalition, among others in NYS
- Partnerships with grocers, restaurants, caterers, and school cafeterias
- Expanded volunteer pool to help transport remaining fresh food items after farmers markets, pantry distributions (pantry-to-pantry), from community and household gardens, and major retailers and institutions such as colleges.
- Basic supplies for volunteers to distribute fresh foods quickly such as pop-up tents, tables, cooling blankets, and gas cards.
- Long-term, shared, centrally-located cold-storage facility and commercial kitchen for repackaging food safely (to put in place after relationships and supply chains are built, piloted, and ready to expand)

Available Resources:

- Dutchess Outreach's Refrigerated Van

IMPLEMENTATION COSTS

ITEM	ONE-TIME COST (\$)	ANNUAL RECURRING (\$)	TOTAL 1ST YEAR BUDGET
Local Food Purchasing Grant Program (3 yr min, with funds secured at implementation)	\$80,000	\$40,000	\$120,000
Stipends to farmers for participation in implementation planning	\$3,000		\$3,000
Logistics support through added hours for program coordinator or project manager on contract		\$20,000	\$20,000
Gas cards for volunteers to transport food		\$3,000	\$3,000
Pop-up tents and tables for single day pantry events at remote locations	\$600		\$600
Cooling blankets for distributing fresh items in summer in personal vehicles	\$1,600		\$1,600
Total		\$63,000	\$148,200

PRIORITY 2

INCREASE FOOD SUPPLY THROUGH ENHANCED RESCUE AND PROCUREMENT PRACTICES

FEASIBILITY SCORE: 3.9

(1 = very low feasibility, 5 = high).

MEASUREMENT	CONSIDERATIONS	SCORE	WEIGHT	WEIGHTED SCORE
Cost (affordability / funding availability)	Sustained, slow growing levels for local food are more important than lump sum spikes. It is important to build a donor base and use escrow or endowment to keep a three to five year horizon for farmers to rely on. Food rescue is much more affordable and instead relies on a committed volunteer force.	4	30%	1.2
Operational complexity (logistics, staffing)	Energetic, strategic staff can achieve these goals with little prior experience but great volunteer management and relationship building. The coordinator should call people and ask for help towards the cause without hesitation.	4	25%	1
Time to implement (months)	Communities proved during COVID that with collective motivation, these logistical operations could be swiftly implemented so long as they were allowed to grow organically through trial and error.	4	10%	0.4
Likelihood of stakeholder buy-in	There is a strong local food movement and many local businesses and farms will be eager to participate once they have confidence in the sustained commitment of the funding and the coordinator	3.5	10%	0.35
Sustainability (ongoing funding / local supply)	A fundraising committee will be needed so the coordinator does not dedicate all their time to fundraising. Large donors should be asked to contribute towards an endowment that can provide steady funding.	3	15%	0.45
Equity impact (benefits marginalized populations)	The quality of the food, the cultural relevance (especially to seniors who learned to cook from scratch and immigrant populations accustomed to whole foods), and the impact on small farms is significant	5	10%	0.5
Feasibility Score				3.9

IMPACT

- 1. Increased, reliable supply of nutritious food:** Strengthened food rescue systems, predictably expanding local procurement, and improved transportation and cold storage for redistribution will increase the volume and consistency of nutrient-dense and culturally preferred fresh, refrigerated, and frozen food items available in pantries across the county (and therefore, the overall supply). This step-by-step approach through incremental contributions by funders, volunteers, and farmers, will avoid the debt issue of many food hubs, which require significant capital outlays.
- 2. Greater systemwide efficiency and resiliency:** Coordinated infrastructure and procurement practices reduce duplication of effort and allow pantries to share resources, streamline logistics, and handle perishable foods more safely. These improvements enable the county to capture more rescued food, reduce spoilage of fresh items left behind at distributions, and move products more quickly to households that need them using a pool of trained volunteers. (look to <https://friendshipdonations.org/> as a long-running best practice model that moves local foods alongside other rescued sources through a volunteer network)
- 3. Subsidized support for small pantries and pop-up pantry events:** Coordinated procurement works on behalf of volunteer-run pantries that cannot build relationships, RFPs, and delivery chains independently with limited human resources, fundraising capability, and accounting operations. It may also support the initiation of pop-up pantries during peak seasons, which are helpful at rural mobile home parks and other spaces that lack full time pantry infrastructure.
- 4. New market opportunities for small farmers:** Predictable demand and fair pricing strengthen farm viability while increasing the availability of high-quality food for Dutchess County residents.

PRIORITY 3: INCREASE ACCESSIBILITY, USE, AND IMPACT OF FOOD PANTRY VISITS

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

1. Expand client choice (shopping) models to the greatest extent possible.
2. Increase household limits to reduce multiple stops for time-constrained, transportation insecure clients.
3. Adjust hours of operation for working adults and students (food distributions after 5pm)
4. Implement trauma-informed client interaction best practices.
5. Provide spaces for ongoing anonymous feedback from pantry clientele through surveys, focus groups, and interviews conducted by third parties.

RESOURCES NEEDED & AVAILABLE RESOURCES

Resources Needed:

- Training in best practices for volunteers and staff at Dutchess County food pantries. (e.g. <https://leahspantry.org/> - free curricula or paid sessions)
- Site visits to best-in-class food distribution models across the county (St. Thomas of Amenia, North East Community Center, Dutchess Outreach Shopping Pantry, etc.)
- Reinventing Food Pantries by Katie Martin - a book with many free and low-cost strategies to improving food pantry environments and expand accessibility
- Micro-grants for pantries to upgrade shelving and other infrastructure for free choice options.

Available Resources:

- Dutchess County Emergency Food Pantry Coalition
- North East Community Center's Tri-Corner Nutrition Security Coalition
- Regional Food Bank micro-grants (availability may be cyclical)

IMPLEMENTATION COSTS

ITEM	ONE-TIME COST (\$)	ANNUAL RECURRING (\$)	TOTAL 1ST YEAR BUDGET
Bi-annual county-wide food pantry training, onboarding training program for new volunteers (identify existing volunteer or employee to oversee this program)		\$2,400	\$2,400
Facilitated workshops to develop a collaborative work plan to strategically address gaps in the food pantry system (paid facilitator, event space, meeting food and beverages)		\$600	\$600
Microgrants for pantry infrastructure improvements towards free choice	\$10,000		\$10,000
Stipends for graduate student interns or other 3rd party to collect insights bi-annually		\$600	\$600
Total		\$3,600	\$13,600

PRIORITY 3

INCREASE ACCESSIBILITY, USE, AND IMPACT OF FOOD PANTRY VISITS

FEASIBILITY SCORE: 4.4

(1 = very low feasibility, 5 = high).

MEASUREMENT	CONSIDERATIONS	SCORE	WEIGHT	WEIGHTED SCORE
Cost (affordability / funding availability)	Food banks and NYS have consistently offered grants for pantries to upgrade or relocate facilities. FBST has offered training through Leah's Pantry with great success.	5	30%	1.5
Operational complexity (logistics, staffing)	Pantries have unique space constraints and may occasionally need to relocate, rebuild, or accept a compromise on best practices	3	25%	0.75
Time to implement (months)	Few barriers once consensus is reached	5	10%	0.5
Likelihood of stakeholder buy-in	Volunteer turnover requires ongoing training but there are opportunities as younger volunteers have higher adoption of new practices	4	10%	0.4
Sustainability (ongoing funding / local supply)	Once new spaces and routines are established, these norms should perpetuate	5	15%	0.75
Equity impact (benefits marginalized populations)	These improvements address many of the needs and requests of pantry clientele (while acknowledging systemic issues of poverty)	5	10%	0.5
Feasibility Score				4.4

IMPACT

- 1. Expanded client reach and retention:** In many communities, food-insecure residents do not visit pantries consistently due to transportation barriers, limited hours, stigma, previous negative experiences, or receiving food that did not meet their needs. These perceptions often spread by word of mouth and shape the reputation of each pantry. A coordinated network that improves client experience across all locations and offers differentiated services (such as dietary-specific pantries, stroller-friendly spaces, or evening hours) can increase the number of people served and the regularity of their visits. Building trust and acceptability among food-insecure households may take time, but it will lead to broader and more consistent use of pantry services.
- 2. Reduced food waste:** Pre-packaged pantry boxes often result in unwanted items that clients discard or pass along to others. For pantries that lack space for full client choice, offering a small food-cupboard area or an immediate “swap” station allows clients to return items that do not meet their dietary needs. This practice reduces waste and also provides valuable insight into what clients actually use and how much food they are truly receiving. These data may show that many clients obtain far less food than they need each week or month, highlighting gaps in access and the need for multiple pantry visits.
- 3. Improved food sourcing flexibility:** Investing in infrastructure that allows pre-packaged pantries to transition toward more client-choice models will also expand their ability to accept fresh, refrigerated, and frozen food. This includes produce from local farms and rescued items from grocers and institutions. Greater flexibility in storage and distribution strengthens pantry resilience, especially as the availability of donated or Regional Food Bank products fluctuates. It also increases the quantity of fruits and vegetables flowing through pantries, addressing nutritional security needs.

ROADMAP

This road map provides a variety of strategies to advance food security and collective impact across organizations at the county level and reflects key elements in the Prioritized Recommendations.

IMMEDIATE / SHORT-TERM STRATEGIES:

- **Fundraise for food to meet immediate needs:**
 - > Help the food pantry charitable food system identify a variety of strategies to increase their food supply (maximizing the Regional Food Bank's "Shop the Dock" program, food purchase grants, mobilizing community-wide food drives, building a local food purchasing fund, etc.).
 - > Immediately bolster food supply for Dutchess County Food Pantry system through food purchase grants, building off of current pantry capacity grants and local partnerships.
 - > Mobilize the volunteer work force to donate funds, food, and service to their local food pantry.
- **Advocate for public policy that advances food security:**
 - > Activate Dutchess county networks to advocate for increases to Nourish New York funds in the state budget and make it eligible for food organizations that are not part of HPNAP.
 - > Work with state representatives to unlock funding sources for general food aid to cover federal shortfalls.
 - > Encourage representatives to increase the farm-donation tax credit. The current incentive (25% of value up to \$5,000) does not cover harvest and distribution costs for most small farms, which results in edible food remaining unharvested.
- **Develop a Dutchess County Food Council work plan:**
 - > Agree to working group structure to guide work of the Food Council for the year ahead (2026 calendar year)
 - > Launch working groups through a half day planning session, setting annual key accomplishments for each working group. This ensures continuity and sustainability of food security efforts across the county.
 - > Host the Community Food System Map on Dutchess County's GIS platform and educate stakeholders about potential uses.
- **Provide immediate and short-term infrastructure support for Dutchess County's charitable food system:**
 - > Through a series of facilitated workshops, build a concrete plan for increasing cold storage, free choice client spaces, and fresh food transportation throughout the pantry network. Begin with pantries in the highest use locations according to the map provided.

LONG-TERM STRATEGIES:

- **Engage in systems-change work:**
 - > Create a systems change, anti-poverty advocacy and policy agenda as a Food Council. Include support for affordable housing and other social drivers of health.
- **Advance local food system (procurement) strategies:**
 - > Work with Dutchess Land Conservancy and Poughkeepsie Farm Project to connect land owners with prospective farmers. PFP has an apprentice program for young adults interested in farming.
- **Innovate in hyper-local ways:**
 - > Consider expanding a food club model in the county, which are affordable membership-based grocery stores, an innovation to the traditional pantry model. More information here: <https://mihealthfund.org/food-clubs-offer-community-centered-approach-to-food-access>. Throughout the project, we heard extensively about the need for "affordable grocery stores" in certain areas of Dutchess County. This model offers an alternative to traditional food pantries and could be replicated over time in areas of high need across the County (including school-based food clubs).
 - > Build off of local food systems assessments to explore a centralized warehouse and Food Hub model.



FOOD COUNCIL WORKING GROUPS WORK PLAN

The following is a recommended work plan to implement food security strategies utilizing the Dutchess County Food Council as a vehicle for change and collective, coordinated action.

WORKING GROUP	FOCUS AREAS	GOALS	KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS FOR 2026	RECOMMENDED MEMBERS WITH SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTISE
Data and Measurement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Address gaps in food supply across the County and develop interventions to fill those gaps. 2. Understand farmer preferences for local food purchasing program. 3. Start a local food purchase program in 2026. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Immediately bolster food supply for Dutchess County Food Pantry system through food purchase grants, building off of current pantry capacity grants and local partnerships. 2. Help the food pantry charitable food system identify a variety of strategies to increase their food supply (maximizing the Regional Food Bank’s “Shop the Dock” program, food purchase grants, mobilizing community-wide food drives, etc.) 	Food Council to add	<p>Gibson Durnford Jordan Schmidt Christine Sergent Renee Filette Sam Petersson Dennis Macheska Evelina Knodel Eion Wrafter</p>
Strengthening Food Pantry Network Capacity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Address food pantry and food systems fragmentation challenges across the county. 2. Work with the food systems working group to share food pantry network capacity needs related to cold storage. 3. Identify and implement a best practices plan for the County, based on client feedback from this needs assessment. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Build a concrete plan for increasing cold storage, expanding shopping choice models, and increasing fresh food transportation throughout the pantry network, beginning with pantries in the highest use locations according to the Community Food Security Map. 2. Work with Work Group 2 on implementing goal 2. 3. Mobilize the volunteer work force to donate funds, food, and service to their local food pantry. 	Food Council to add	<p>Jordan Schmidt Deanna Jacobs Inginia Jackson Representative of the Regional Food Bank (Stacy Dedring)</p>

RESOURCE MAPPING

This is a list of all current investments into food security in Dutchess County through philanthropic, County government, and large in-kind donation contributors (food). Note: This list should be updated by the Food Council and serve as an estimated baseline on current investments and, in time, serve as a starting place for building out a resource development plan for county-wide food security investments.

MONETARY SUPPORT:

- USDA grant awarded (2025) to Rock Steady Farm (Kaye Ranch, LLC): \$2,221,380.27
- Community Foundations of the Hudson Valley: nearly \$2,00,000 over the last 5 years, with an average of \$355,317 per year.
- Dutchess County Planning and Development Department - \$322,486
- Dyson Foundation: They have a 5-year total of over \$1,000,000, most years average around \$200,000. In 2024 they gave \$244,000
- United Way of Orange and Dutchess County - \$40,000
- The Regional Food Bank “Food Forward” Grant Program
- Nuvance (Food is Medicine work)
- Field Hall Foundation
- State of New York via Dutchess Outreach: \$293,085
- County of Dutchess via Dutchess Outreach: \$234,669
- Charles D. Fleischman Charitable Trust: \$171,045
- Helen’s Hope Foundation: \$125,000
- Community Foundations of the Hudson River Valley – Dutchess Responds Fund

FOOD DONATIONS:

- Regional Food Bank - 5,165,827 pounds in 2024
- Tenmile Farm - 138,607 pounds in 2024
- Sky High Farm - 32,000 pounds and eggs

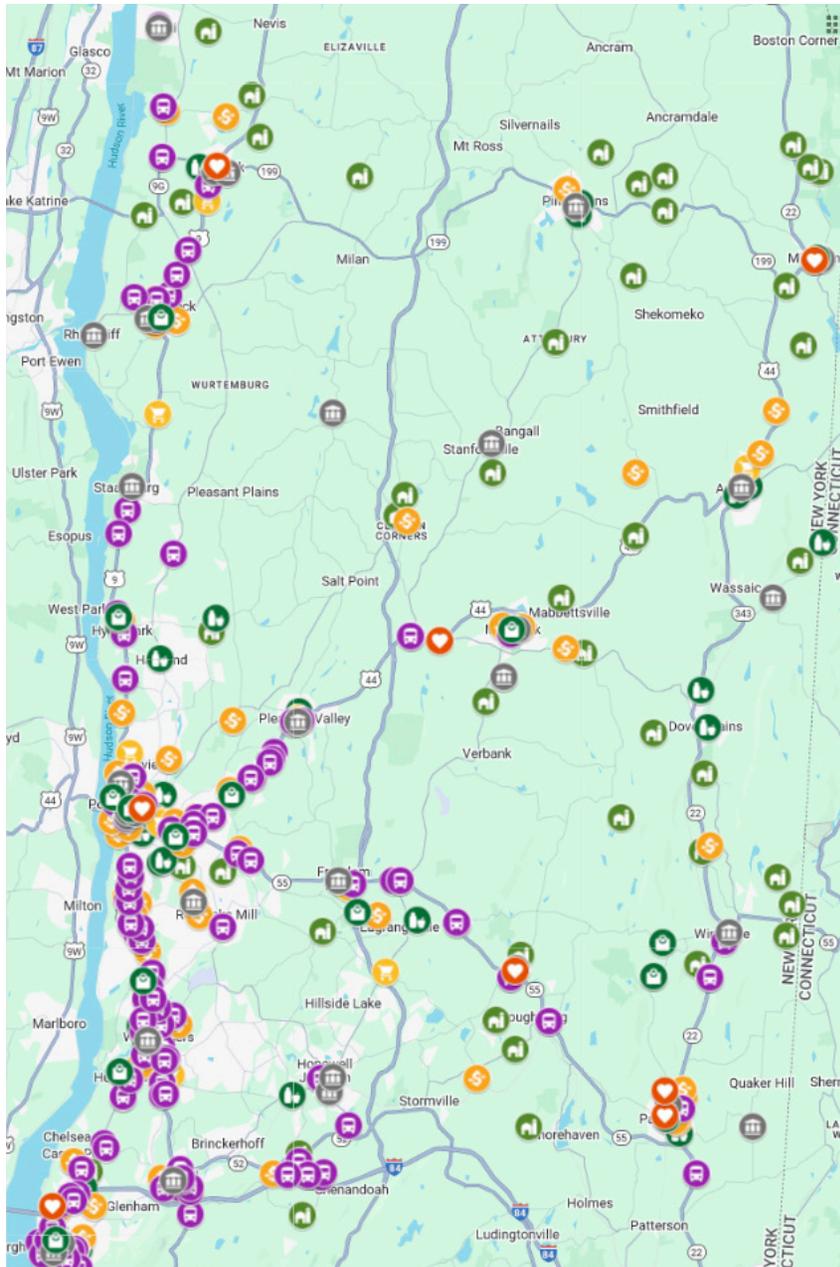
CONCLUSION

Dutchess County is home to a committed network of leaders, organizations, farmers, and residents who are working every day to ensure that all community members have the food and support they need to thrive. This assessment reveals both the urgency and the opportunity: more than 20% of adults are experiencing food insecurity, with certain populations facing disproportionate challenges. Meanwhile, the charitable food system is strained by diminished food supply, limited funding for local procurement, logistical barriers, and inconsistent client experiences across the county.

Yet, this report also highlights significant assets and opportunities within reach. Organizations across Dutchess County are piloting innovative approaches—such as sliding-scale CSA farm shares, expanded gleaning and food rescue, and dignity-forward food distribution environments—that can be scaled with the right coordination and investment. Local agriculture offers potential to supply fresh, culturally preferred foods if paired with long-term purchasing commitments and shared distribution infrastructure.

The three priority recommendations outlined—enhanced county-wide coordination, strengthened rescue and procurement systems, and expanded accessibility and best practices across the pantry network—provide a clear, stepwise roadmap for action. These strategies are feasible, build from existing strengths, and center the voices and needs of residents experiencing food insecurity. With sustained leadership, cross-sector collaboration, and continued attention to dignity and equity, Dutchess County can build a more resilient and responsive food access system—one that not only meets today’s needs but strengthens long-term community health and economic wellbeing. Implementing this roadmap will accelerate progress toward a future in which all Dutchess County residents have reliable access to nutritious, affordable, and culturally relevant foods—every day, in every community.

COMMUNITY FOOD SYSTEM MAP Appendix D

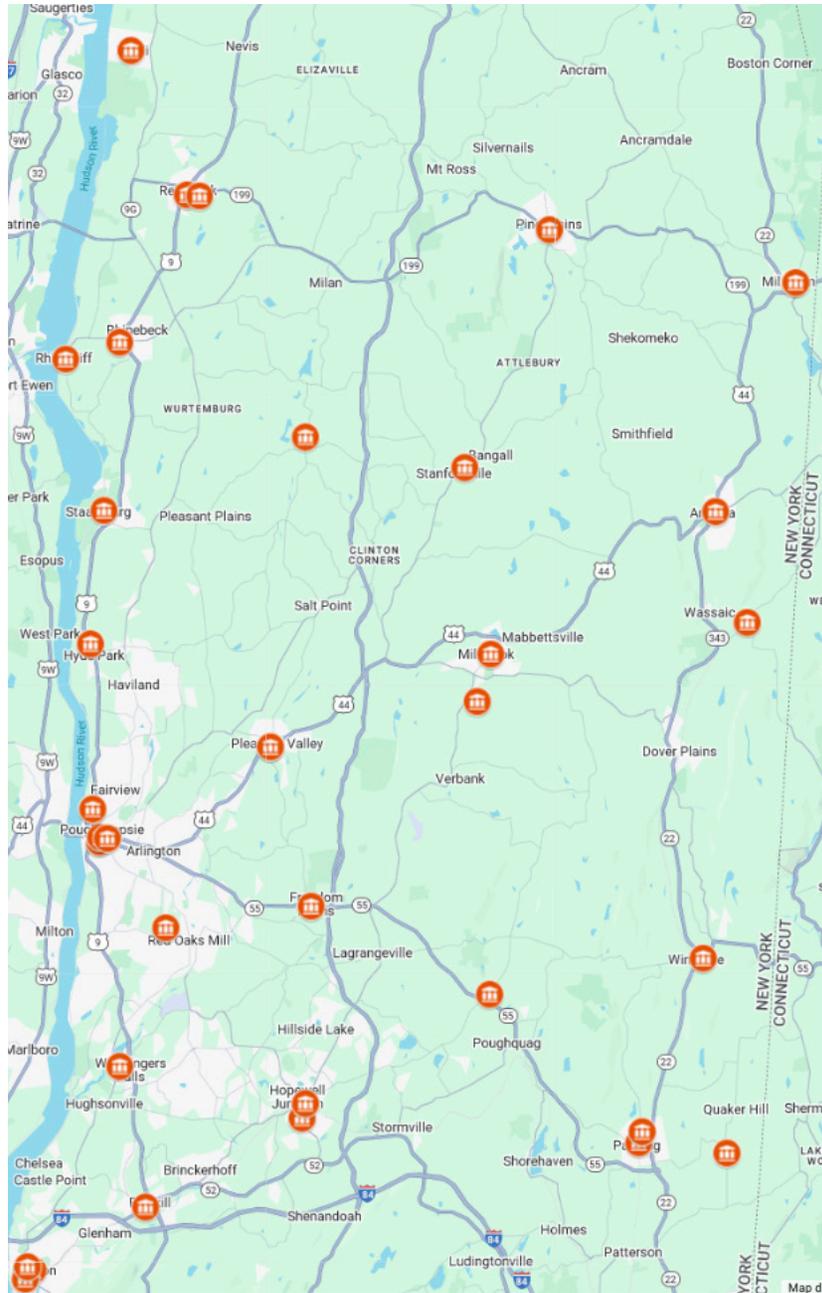


-  County Resources
-  Emergency Food Relief Organizations
-  Farmer's Markets
-  Farms
-  Institutional Food Buyers
-  Supermarkets

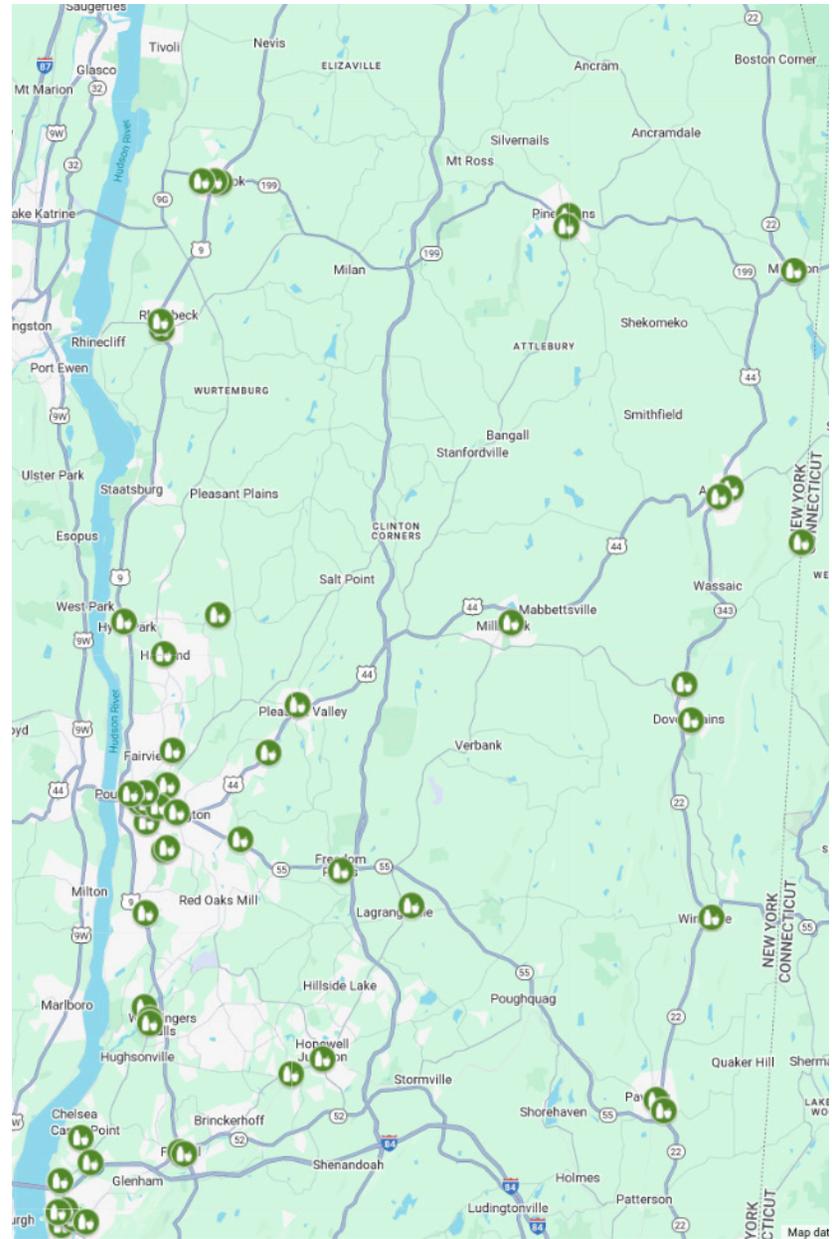


Link to
Interactive
Maps

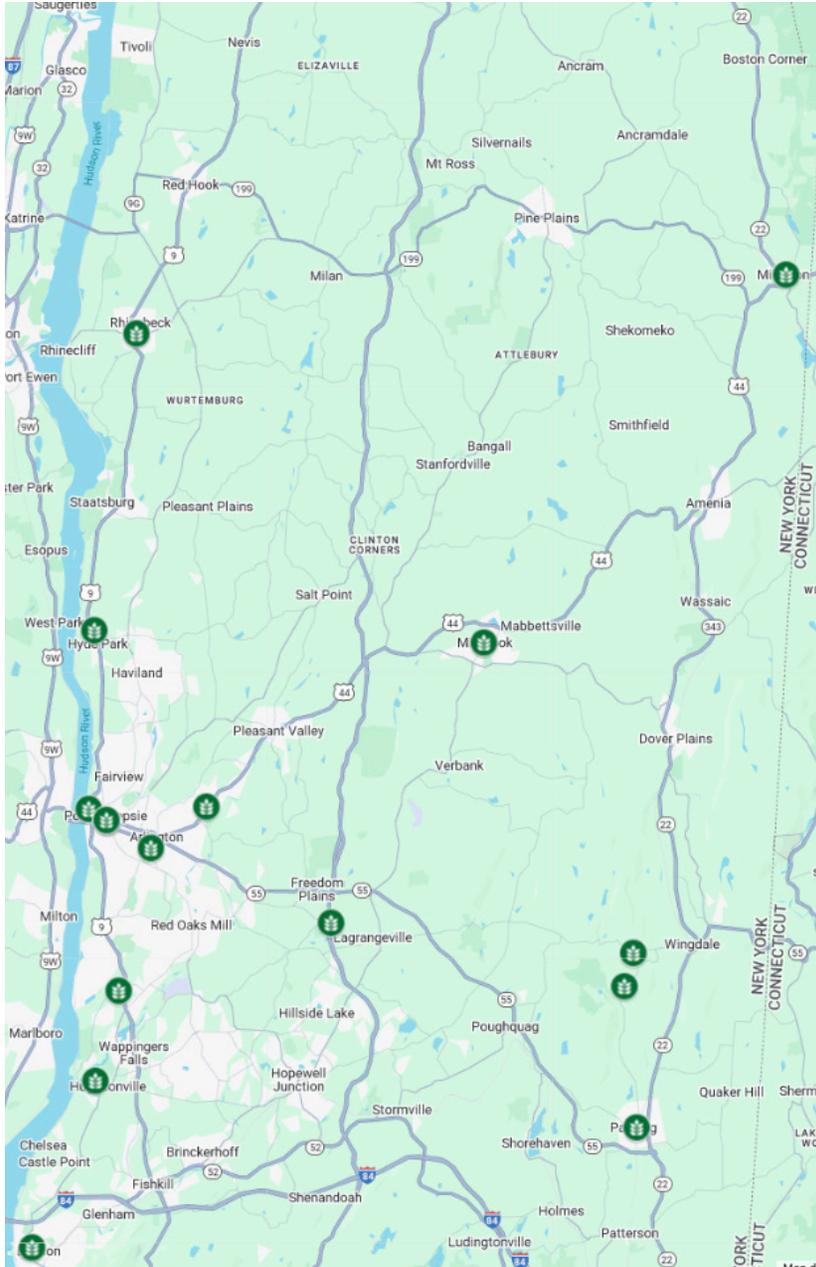
County Resources



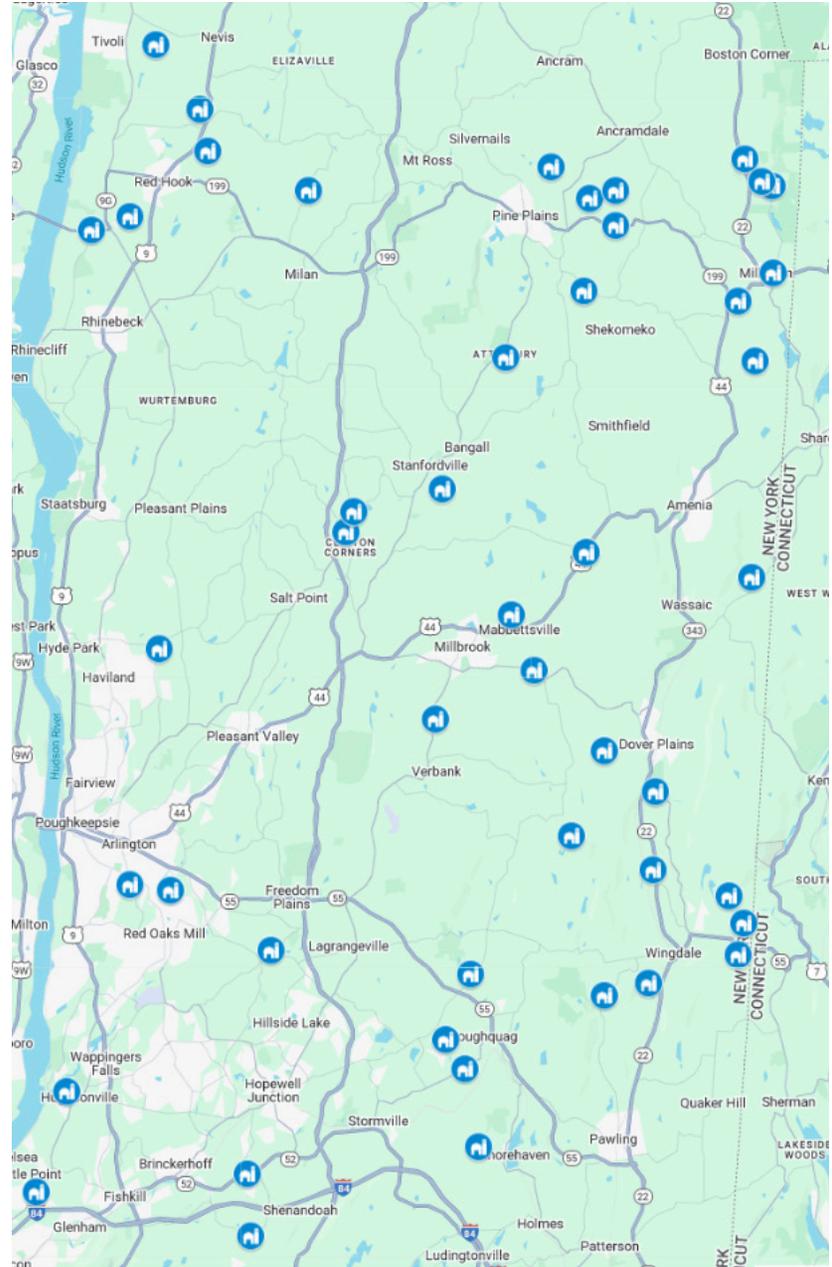
Emergency Food Relief Organizations



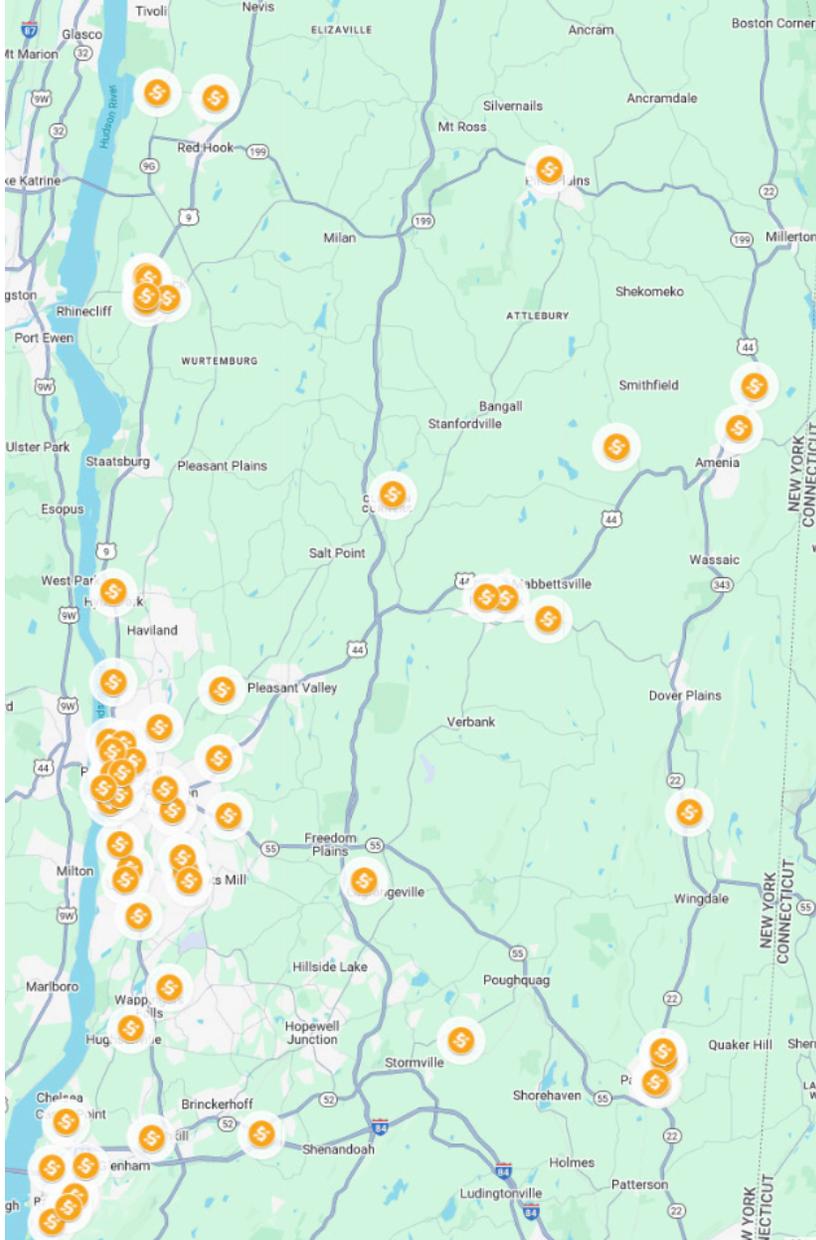
Farmer's Markets



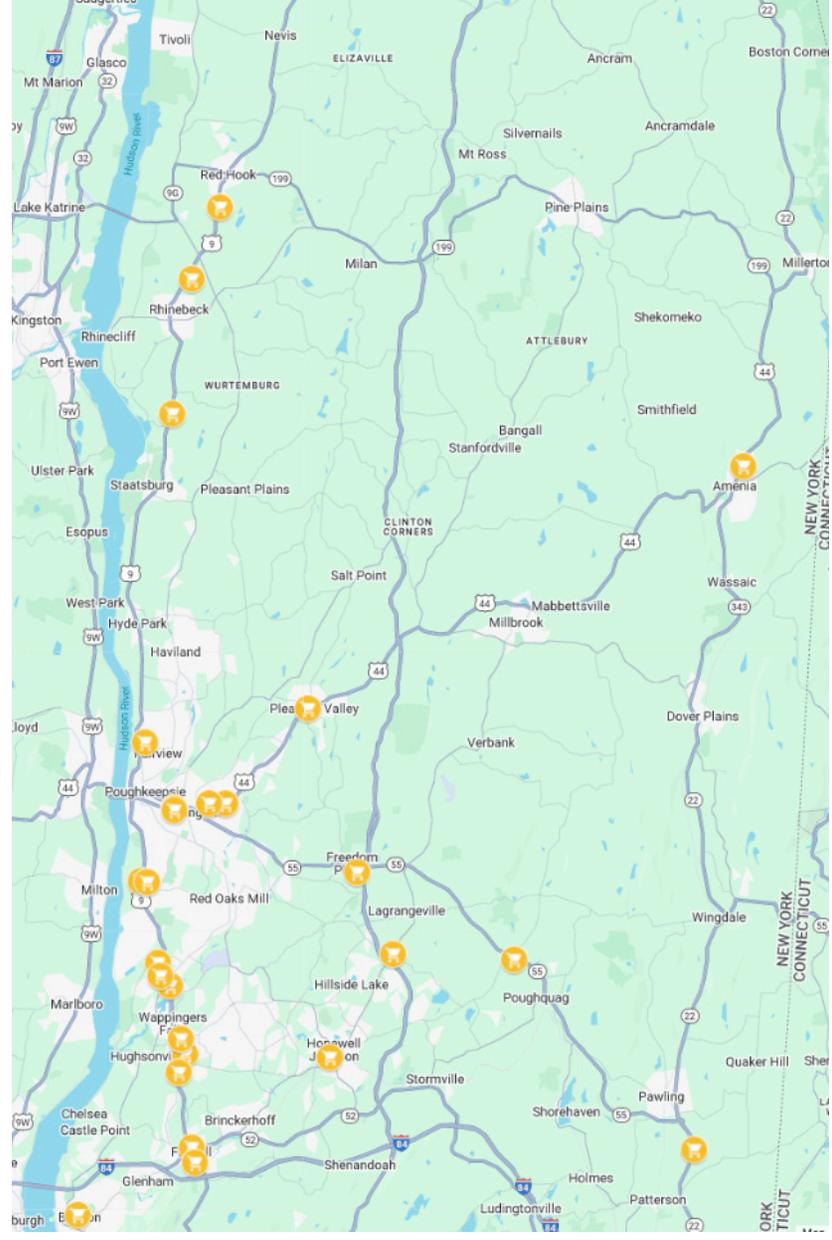
Farms



Institutional Food Buyers

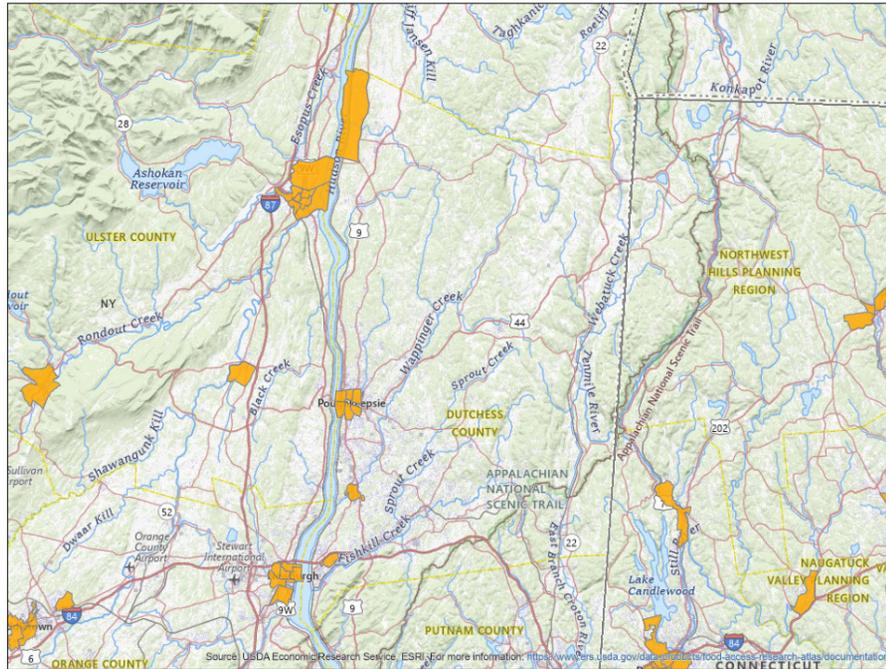


Supermarkets



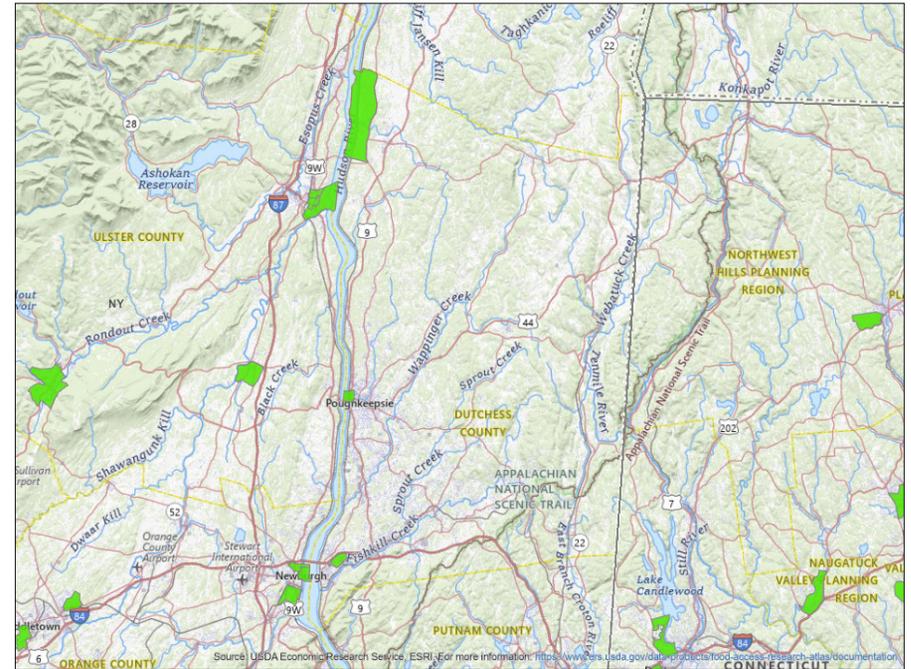
USDA FOOD DESERT MAPS (LOW ACCESS, LOW INCOME) Appendix E

Food Deserts 5 and 10



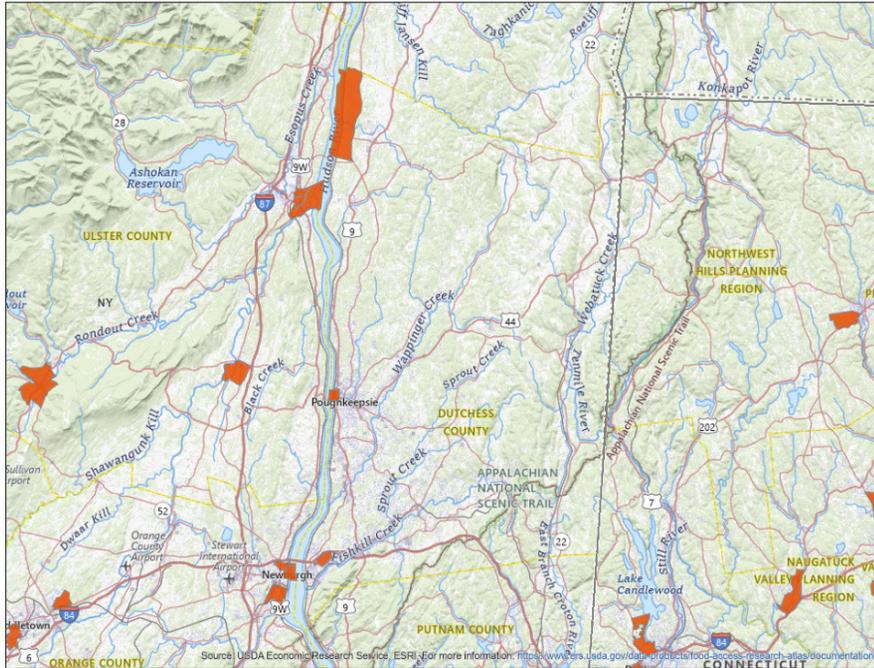
Low-income census tracts where a significant number or share of residents is more than 1/2 mile (urban) or 10 miles (rural) from the nearest supermarket.

Food Deserts 1 and 10



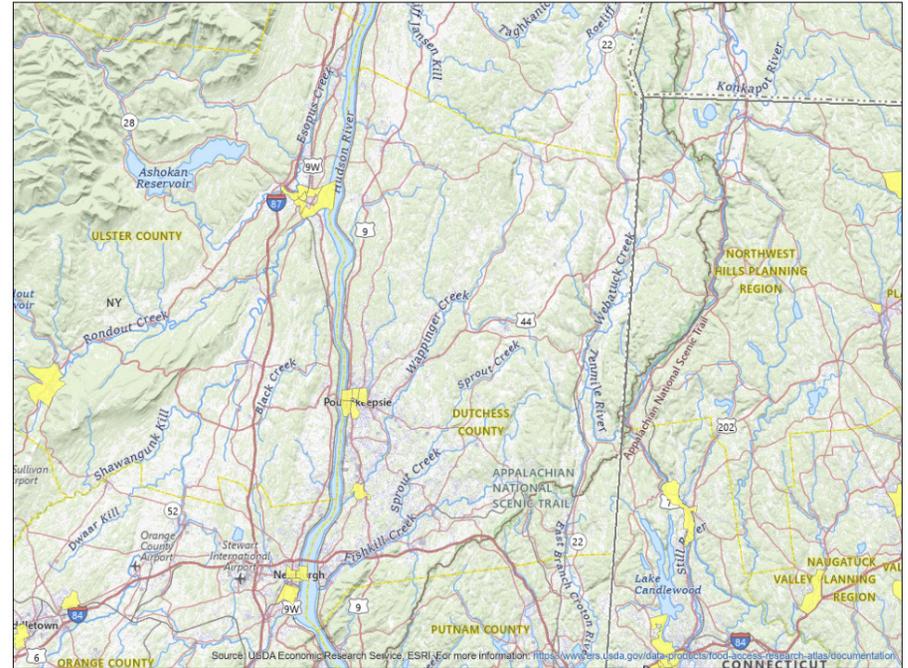
Low-income census tracts where a significant number or share of residents is more than 1 mile (urban) or 10 miles (rural) from the nearest supermarket.

Food Deserts 1 and 20



Low-income census tracts where a significant number or share of residents is more than 1 mile (urban) or 20 miles (rural) from the nearest supermarket.

Food Deserts Vehicle Access



Low-income census tract where more than 100 housing units do not have a vehicle and are more than 1/2 mile from the nearest supermarket, or a significant number or share of residents are more than 20 miles from the nearest supermarket.