

Nutrition Access & Security

2025 NEW HAMPSHIRE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE STRATEGIC PLAN

Purpose: To understand the challenges and opportunities facing the ability of individuals and communities to safely, affordably, and reliably access an adequate amount of nutritious and culturally preferred foods, including locally and regionally produced foods, to support a healthy life.

What's at Stake?

Access to nutritious food is critical for supporting health and wellbeing and preventing disease. While state and federal programs exist to connect vulnerable populations with affordable, nutritious, and culturally preferred foods, significant barriers remain, especially for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities who are disproportionately impacted by food insecurity in New Hampshire. Existing programs that increase access to locally produced foods serve as an opportunity to reduce food insecurity, while supporting New Hampshire farmers, but policy change, investment, and collective on the ground work are needed to foster these programs and other efforts in support of a healthier, more equitable state.

Current Conditions: Nutrition Access

As of May 2024, 135,200 New Hampshire residents, including 33,720 children, faced food insecurity—a 43.9% increase from the previous year— while 425,000 experienced food insufficiency, lacking enough food or the kinds of foods they needed. Older adults were especially impacted, with 80,251 affected. Poverty, geography, transportation barriers, and inflation drive these challenges, particularly in rural areas, where food costs in the Northeast rose 25% between 2019 and 2024. Systemic racism and discriminatory policies further exacerbate disparities, with 20% of Black and 16% of Hispanic households facing food insecurity compared to 7% of White households.

Although not all those experiencing food insecurity are eligible, federal nutrition programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Women, Infants, and Children program (WIC), the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), and Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) provide vital

support, but these programs face funding, outreach, and policy challenges. Furthermore, refugees and immigrants often encounter barriers or fear in accessing them.

School meal policies, like Breakfast After the Bell, reduce barriers to School Breakfast Program (SBP) participation, yet 7,800 eligible students still miss out due to lack of awareness, misconceptions about nutrition, and concerns over lost instructional time.

Adults aged 60 and older and people living with a disability can access the Meals on Wheels (MOW) Program which, for many of the recipients, provides their main meal of the day. Post-pandemic funding changes necessitates identifying alternative means to continue serving New Hampshire's aging population.

Challenges and Opportunities: Nutrition Access

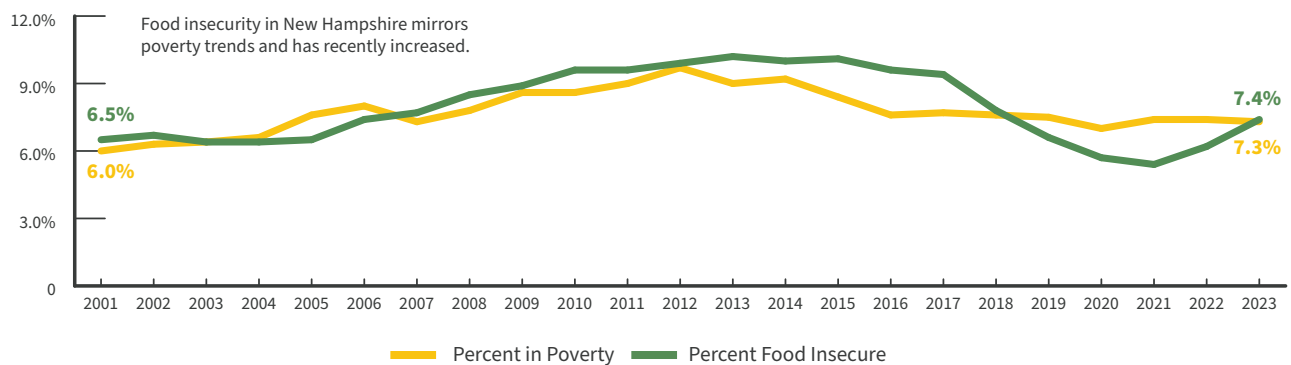
CHALLENGES

- Insufficient funding for outreach, low awareness of food insecurity, and limited qualitative data on participant barriers hinder increased participation in nutrition programs.
- A lack of robust data about the reasons for enrollment and participation gaps makes it difficult for policymakers to prioritize solutions effectively, emphasizing the need for education and research.
- Complex application processes, language barriers, stigma, and uncoordinated messaging across federal nutrition programs further complicate access. Furthermore, silos between programs and insufficient promotion of federal nutrition programs limit their reach and effectiveness.
- Although many eligible for government assistance do not enroll, there are many facing food insecurity who fail to qualify for assistance, relying instead on emergency food providers that do not require means testing but offer limited support.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Leverage federal grants to improve outreach, streamline application processes, and use technology for multilingual support.
- Expand “Food as Medicine” initiatives through Medicaid waivers and partnerships to enhance access, reduce healthcare costs, and improve public health outcomes.
- Partner with local organizations and initiatives, like farm to school, to improve access to locally grown foods.
- Research and advocate for policies implemented in other states, such as extending SNAP recertification periods and simplifying CACFP eligibility criteria, to improve program accessibility and sustainability.
- Revive the Nutrition Access Research Action Network to assess statewide needs and support evidence-based policy development.

POVERTY AND FOOD INSECURITY IN NEW HAMPSHIRE, 2001-2023



SOURCES: U.S. Census Bureau *Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates* (via FRED) and USDA Economic Research Service, *Household Food Security in the United States*, multiple years.

Current Conditions: Local Food Access

Nearly half of New Hampshire residents buy local farm food at least a few times a month, though engagement varies by county. Local food access efforts address inequities by connecting communities with fresh, culturally significant foods, while supporting farmers. Programs like Granite State Market Match (GSMM) and Double Up Food Bucks (DUFB) expand access to local food for low-income residents. In 2023, GSMM redeemed \$132,800.86 over 4,687 transactions and DUFB accounted for \$352,397.46 over 55,126 transactions. Vouchers for Veterans redeemed \$125,000 through 15,000 transactions, and NH Feeding NH purchased 503,543 pounds of food from 117 farms.

Programs for WIC participants and seniors at farmers' markets similarly increase access to local produce. A WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP), expected to launch in 2025, will complement existing efforts like GSMM and Senior FMNP. Reduced-cost CSA initiatives, such as NOFA-NH's Farm Share Program and others, serve communities that do not qualify for assistance, thus rely heavily on fundraising to operate.

By fostering connections between farmers and underserved communities, these programs create dignified access to local food and build resilient value chains that strengthen community health, equity, and economic vitality.

Challenges and Opportunities: Local Food Access

CHALLENGES

- Sustained funding is essential to balance affordable pricing for consumers with fair compensation for farmers.
- Local food accessibility barriers include cost, transportation, cold storage, food preferences, culinary skills, and limited hours or locations for SNAP incentive programs. Many farmers' markets operate during restricted hours, making it difficult for SNAP users to access benefits.
- Of the approximately 4,000 farms in New Hampshire, only 15 currently offer SNAP incentives at their stores and stands, with few farm stores equipped to accept cards or maintain regular hours.
- Corner stores, common in low-income neighborhoods, rarely stock fresh or local food, though initiatives like the Manchester Corner Store Program offer a model for expansion to cities like Concord and Nashua.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Programs like NH Feeding NH and GSMM can be expanded to bridge gaps in local food access. Leveraging established CSA initiatives across the state and promoting options like SNAP acceptance, payment plans, and reduced-cost shares can enhance accessibility.
- Collaborative programs, such as Healthcare Without Harm's Food is Medicine initiative, highlight the role of local food in improving health.
- Increasing gleaned efforts, supporting farm to school programs, and expanding local food access through food pantries and schools can reduce waste and enhance equity.
- Addressing geographic and operational gaps in local food access could ensure fresh, local foods are available where people already shop.

Summary

Nutrition and local food access are interconnected pillars of a resilient and equitable food system, addressing both immediate needs and systemic challenges. Nutrition access encompasses more than food assistance programs; it also involves ensuring that all individuals— regardless of income, geography, or cultural background— can obtain nutritious and desired foods. Barriers to nutrition access include financial constraints, geographic isolation, systemic inequities, and social stigmas. Many individuals who face financial barriers do not qualify for food assistance programs and must rely on alternative community resources or limited emergency food providers.

Local food access complements these efforts by building connections between communities and local farmers to provide fresh, culturally significant foods while supporting farmers. Programs like Granite State Market Match and farm to school initiatives bridge gaps in affordability and accessibility, enhancing community health and resilience. Local food access is also vital for climate resilience, as communities most vulnerable to climate change are often also those facing the greatest food insecurity and are disproportionately impacted by global supply chain disruptions. Strengthening local and regional food systems reduces these risks, fosters sustainability, and builds equitable, community-driven value chains.

Efforts like Farm to Food Assistance illustrate how shifting power and resources to farmers and consumers can transform food systems from a profit-driven model to one centered on equity, dignity, and the human right to food. Addressing the interdependencies between nutrition and local food access, New Hampshire can build a food system that supports climate adaptation, reduces inequities, and fosters systemic change. This summary lays the foundation for actionable recommendations to advance these goals.

Recommendations

- **Address policy and funding barriers for food access programs.** Advocate for state and federal funding to expand federal nutrition programs, including support for staff and program implementation. Simplify eligibility criteria and expand diverse delivery models, such as Breakfast After the Bell. Seek further administrative and legislative change to remove access and implementation barriers.
- **Streamline enrollment and extend recertification for food access programs.** Implement auto-enrollment in SNAP, WIC, and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) with Medicaid and extend SNAP recertification periods to ensure consistent participation for vulnerable populations.
- **Improve outreach and education campaigns for food assistance programs and food insecurity issues.** Launch public education campaigns to raise awareness about food assistance programs and food insecurity issues, addressing stigma while providing resources for navigating applications. Ensure cohesive and effective communication, including language access and translation services, through continued funding for a Food Access Coordinator position within the NH Department of Health and Human Services (NH DHHS) to unify messaging and outreach across separately managed food assistance programs. Support local food access coalitions to customize and implement campaigns and leverage trusted local relationships for awareness and application assistance.
- **Enhance cultural competence in the public assistance workforce.** Develop and pilot an ongoing statewide training/coaching program for all public assistance workers that trains in cultural competence to better serve diverse communities and improve program retention. Fund workforce capacity beyond volunteers to optimize program operations and access.

- **Conduct research on Federal Nutrition Programs every three years.** This research should identify barriers to enrollment and participation, methods to improve utilization, and address community food access needs. Partner with local universities and public health departments to access expert knowledge, resources, credibility, and potential cost savings, enhancing the program impacts.
- **Systematize food access data collection.** Incorporate food access into existing statewide and regional data collection systems, like Community Health Improvement Plans (CHIPs), Community Health Needs Assessments (CHNAs), Statewide Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) and the NH DHHS Roadmap. Align and standardize efforts across timelines to ensure consistent and actionable food access focus statewide.
- **Study light processing opportunities.** Conduct a statewide assessment of assets, barriers, and opportunities for light processing to improve New Hampshire-grown food access in the emergency food system while supporting New Hampshire farmers.
- **Expand Granite State Market Match and strengthen local food access infrastructure.** Increase funding for programs, like NH Feeding NH, Granite State Market Match, and Double Up Food Bucks to improve access to fresh, local foods. Expand Granite State Market Match to farm stores by identifying eligible locations, addressing staffing and infrastructure needs, and providing capacity-building support to integrate EBT into existing POS systems. Enhance accessibility further by supporting farm stores and farmers' markets to offer SNAP incentives, extend operating hours, and implement cold storage solutions.
- **Facilitate zero-interest CSA loans.** Collaborate with credit unions and community banks to offer zero-interest loans for purchasing CSA shares, enhancing affordability and access to local foods.

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For more information, including references and opportunities to get involved, visit the 2025 NH Food and Agriculture Strategic Plan web page on nhfoodalliance.org or scan the QR code on the inside front cover of the print version.