

Let's Talk: Food System - Holly Payne

Is the Food System Doing Its Job?

The food system is set up to favor industrial agriculture and food conglomerates, leaving out small farmers and vulnerable groups. Outcomes for the wealthiest nation include chronically high levels of food insecurity and widespread health crises (like diabetes, obesity, and heart disease). These food-induced health crises are life threatening and very costly. For decades, the food system has been failing large numbers of its people.

How Has Food Security Changed During the Pandemic?

Food is abundant in Tompkins County. But *Feeding America Map the Meal Gap* shows:

All residents: Tompkins County total population is over 102,000+ people. In 2018 (before COVID) 10.4% of all Tompkins County residents (about 10,700) struggled to get enough basic, healthy food. This year (2020), 15% of all residents are projected to face food insecurity in Tompkins.

Children: In 2018, 15% of children (2,300) were food insecure. This year (2020), 22% of all children are projected to be food insecure.

People most affected by food insecurity and by food-induced health problems, are low income, and/or people of color, and/or rural.

Who is Collaborating to Make the Food System Equitable and Sustainable?

Food Policy Council of Tompkins County – cross-sector Council building a participatory food system plan structured to serve all people in the county.

Childhood Nutrition Collaborative – cross-sector collaborative working to build food access and empowerment for Tompkins County's young people (ages 0-24 years)

Tompkins County COVID-19 Food Task Force – collaboration of partners from 70+ government agencies, farms, schools, universities, nonprofits, businesses and foundations, set up to coordinate safe food distributions for hungry residents, and support local food producers during the pandemic.

What Strategies Work to Reduce Food Insecurity?

Federal food policy is the most consequential:

SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program = food stamps), WIC (supplemental income for Women with Infants and Children <5 or younger); Pandemic EBT (\$420 max total for each school child enrolled in Medicaid); CEP Schools offering universal free school breakfast and lunch to 100% of their students. CFAP (Coronavirus Federal Assistance Program) to compensate farmers for unprecedented financial losses: Nourish NY: \$25 million so Food Banks could purchase directly from NY farmers.

Unemployment Benefits (Tompkins County went from 3.5% Unemployment (pre-COVID) to 10% (largely due to closings in education and tourism industries), Federal rent assistance program. These programs shift SNAP enrollment.

When government support falls short, the community tries to fill in:

Food Task Force focused on emerging coordination themes:

Food production themes

- Small Farm Aggregations; Food Processing Kitchens; Home gardens and solidarity gardens; The emerging story of *Nourish Tompkins*

Food distribution themes

- Last miles transport; Food pantries vs Deliveries vs Distributions vs Cabinets
- The emerging story of West Village Apartments

Communication Themes

- Food Task Force improves information dispersal about resources, networks contacts, supports 211 as central hub for info + food referrals
- We gather and share survey results (about food security, farming, food pantries, and access to health and food information during the pandemic)

TC COVID Food Task Force has 3 teams (Production, Distribution, and Communication Teams), which meet bi-weekly. We collaborate closely with Childhood Nutrition Collaborative and Tompkins County Food System Plan.

To join a Food Task Force zoom meeting, contact Holly Payne hp67@cornell.edu