

# Food Access and Security

## Food System Baseline Assessment

Prepared by Tompkins Food Future,  
a team coordinated by the Food Policy Council of Tompkins County

Presented to the Tompkins Community in January 2022

Cover image: Alesia Kozik



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# Introduction

Food, like air and water, is essential to human life. Beyond keeping us alive, food is an important predictor of success in life, a key component of individual and collective identity, and a source of pleasure that has the power to connect us to other people and cultures. Being well-nourished enables us to participate fully in life -- to sleep well, feel good, move our bodies, perform at work, learn at school, contribute to our communities, and to live a satisfying life overall. Even if we ourselves are food secure, the food insecurity of our neighbors negatively impacts the whole community (see the Appendix A: Consequences of Food Insecurity).

This document focuses on food security in Tompkins County as well as current and future barriers to food access. You will notice how some residents face few true barriers, some face a single substantial barrier, while others face many. Food access issues can also change rapidly through a shift in personal or economic circumstances, or gradually, as we age and change our needs and habits.

One access issue that will impact all of us is our changing climate. The section entitled, “Climate-Induced Food Losses” addresses the impact of changing weather, extreme weather events, and coastal flooding on the production and distribution of food. These shifts will lead to price spikes, shortfalls, and exacerbated inequalities. Unfortunately, this future is already underway. We must plan our personal and collective response to achieve a balance between meeting human needs without exceeding our ecological limits.

Despite the abundance of food available in Tompkins County, nearly 12,000 of our neighbors struggle to regularly access and afford enough fresh, healthy, culturally appropriate food that meets their preferences. Here we explore the nature and scope of food insecurity in Tompkins County and some of the conditions that inhibit food access.

## **Data Sources**

The data for this section was gathered in 2020-2021 from a food access questionnaire arranged in partnership with the Tompkins COVID-19 Food Task Force (541 respondents), our own Community Questionnaire (592 respondents), 30 Stakeholder interviews with staff and volunteers working in food access and security, in-person surveys with food pantry clients (20 respondents from a convenience sample), and neighborhood door-to-door surveys. While the findings are not intended to be representative of all individuals in the county, respondents represent all municipalities, racial/ethnic identities, income levels, and educational attainment.



Additional public data (e.g., Feeding America’s annual *Map the Meal Gap* report) was also used and is cited, accordingly. We were limited in our ability to gather sufficient localized information for each municipality in Tompkins and so in places, our diverse region appears as a monolith.

While relevant data on food insecurity at the national and state levels do exist, a single, holistic account of food insecurity in Tompkins County does not. County-wide data and tracking are essential to inform and accelerate the work being done to advance food security and increase equity in the Tompkins County food system.

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*“We need yearly monitoring, but we also don’t have a way to monitor in a more fine-tuned way, predict crises, and mini-monitoring (is an emergency happening, where, how to respond), and risk mitigation—which we haven’t had at all here” —Tompkins County COVID-19 Food Task Force Volunteer*

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### Food Access and Security

**Food is accessible** when it is affordable and community members can readily grow or raise it, find it, obtain it, transport it, prepare it, and eat it.

*(Healthy Food Policy Project)*

**Food security** for a household is defined as “access by all members at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life.” Food security includes at a minimum:

- 1) The ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods.
- 2) Assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways (that is, without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing, or other coping strategies).

**Food insecurity** is defined as "the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.

*(USDA Economic Research Service)*

## Overview: Food Access and Security

Imagine you are traveling through your community looking for food. Are you traveling by vehicle, foot, or public transportation? You arrive at your destination. Is it a grocery store, restaurant, gas station, or something else? Can you find the food you prefer, in amounts that are adequate, culturally appropriate, and nutritious? Are you able to afford the items you desire?

Your answers to these questions hint at your level of food access and security. Either now or in the past, you or a loved one may have experienced **food insecurity**: you don't know when or where your next meal is coming from, if it will be enough, or if it will be the right food for you or your family. Our ability to access adequate, healthful and appropriate food impacts our physical, mental, social, and

emotional well-being in different ways. See sidebar (grey box) for definitions of food access, food security and food insecurity.

Food insecurity can present in varying degrees of severity and can shift over time (Figure 1). The following examples provide further insight:

- A married couple in Dryden makes enough money to meet their needs, but the income is variable and does not come in consistently. Though they prefer fresh fruits and



vegetables, they rely on frozen and canned foods to last, in case they go through a period without income. They have **marginal food security**.

- A single parent of two in Ithaca must feed the children first, and once utilities are paid for, the parent themself may not have funds to eat. This family has **very low food security**.
- Another single parent in Trumansburg doesn't have a car but lives next to the grocer. The family is able to shop easily for food they can reliably afford, and which leaves them full and nourished. The children help fetch and prepare food, but if they are too tired to cook, they can afford to eat out. This family is **food secure**.
- A full time college student can't afford the school meal plan. They work part time for a restaurant, at which they are fed and given food to take home. This person has **low food security**.



Figure 1: Levels of food security



A number of low-income residents have access to programs like Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps, and WIC (Women Infants and Children). However, these programs do not always meet households' food budget needs and many eligible populations are not currently participating or using these resources.

Additionally, some Tompkins County residents fall into a gap—earning too much to qualify for public assistance programs, but still struggling to stretch a limited food and household budget. Feeding America estimates that about a third of all food insecure residents are in this situation. Private food assistance programs like area food pantries, meal sites, Mutual Aid food cabinets, and many others support Tompkins County residents in need of additional food. Some of those services are mentioned in this section but are more fully described in “Emergency Feeding Operations” under the Food Environment section.

Being food insecure takes a toll on an individual in immeasurable ways and affects every aspect of one's life. The distraction and constant worry of not having what you need, managing shame and judgement (perceived or real), and having to justify your worthiness (eligibility) leads to chronic stress (see Appendix A: Consequences of Food Insecurity). When this occurs continually, or is triggered by multiple sources, it can have a cumulative toll on a person's physical and mental health in the present and across their lifetime. This type of hardship shapes a person, their relationships, their well-being, and their life trajectory.

Food insecurity exacerbates other challenges and leads to a cumulative impact on the entire community. Food insecurity takes a toll on communities and in society by reducing the contributions individuals can make, and strains resources required to deal with the downstream effects. Food insecurity impacts school success, job performance, health outcomes, healthcare costs, mental health, crime, and incarceration rates, and more.

This baseline report aims to pull together a snapshot of what we do know, but the picture is incomplete.

# Food Security in Tompkins County

In this section, we explore the nature and scope of food insecurity in Tompkins County, and some of the conditions that create barriers to food access. Despite the abundance of food available in Tompkins County, nearly 12,000 of our neighbors struggle to regularly access and afford enough fresh, healthy, culturally appropriate food that meets their preferences.

**11.6% of our friends, neighbors and colleagues struggle to regularly access good food** (Figure 2), often having to make tough choices between paying bills, buying essential medicines, or forgoing nutrient rich foods. Solving this challenge will require our community to go beyond food to disrupt the root causes of food insecurity.

The Map the Meal Gap annual report from Feeding America, the nation’s largest domestic hunger-relief organization with a network of 200 food banks across the country, shows what food insecurity looks like at the local level. The 2019 report shows the overall rate of food insecurity in Tompkins at 11.6%, with a higher prevalence among children of 13.3% (Figure 2).

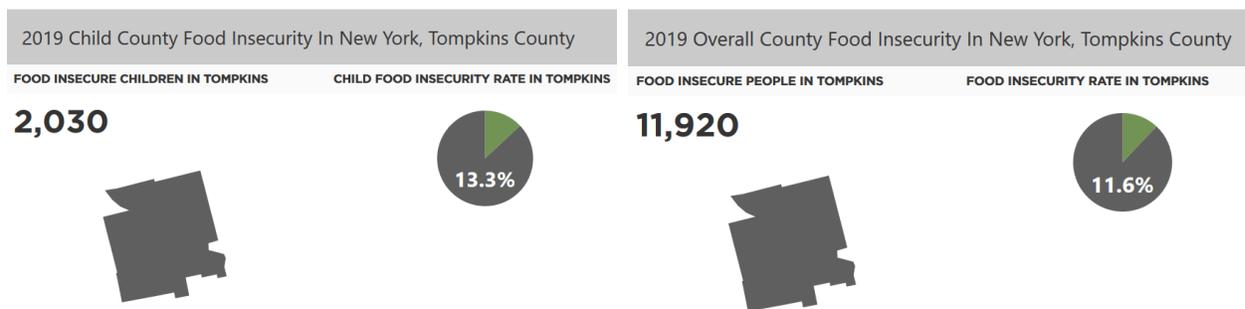


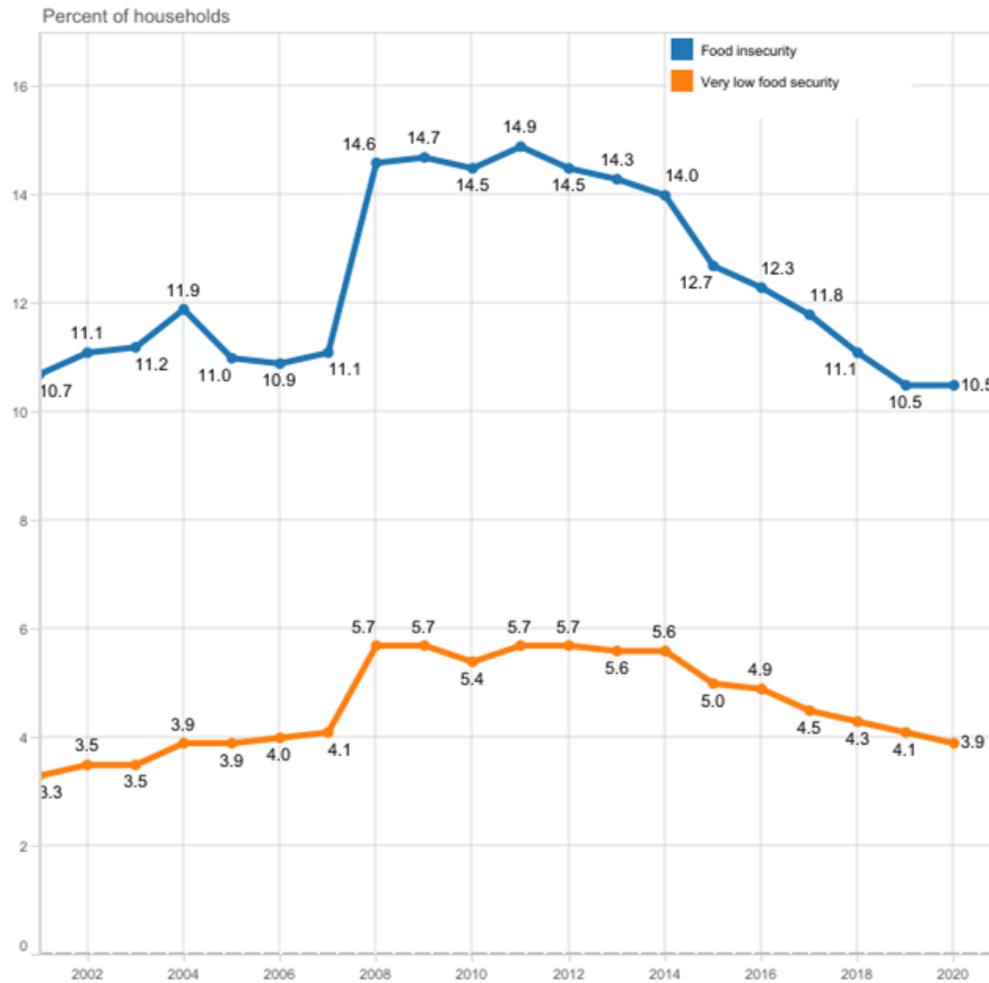
Figure 2: Child food insecurity vs overall food insecurity

NYS food insecurity in 2019 was 10.7% overall and 15.6% for children (Map the Meal Gap). National U.S food insecurity in 2019 was 10.5% of households, marking a steady decrease from its peak of 14.9% in 2011. There has been a steady decline in food insecurity prevalence among U.S. households in the years following the recession after it had peaked at 15% in 2011 (Figure 3). Prior to the pandemic in 2019, food insecurity was at its lowest point - 10.5% - since the 1990s when measurement began (Figure 3). On the surface, these statistics seem to indicate a marked improvement in people’s lives. And yet, more than 35 million people, including 11 million children, were food insecure. Substantial progress has not been made in the U.S. for many years. The current number of people suffering is still higher than pre-



recession years, when it was already a massive, chronic problem. Any improvements, real or perceived, have been upended by the pandemic.

Trends in the prevalence of food insecurity and very low food security in U.S. households, 2001-20



Source: Calculated by USDA, Economic Research Service, using Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement data. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/>

Figure 3: Trends in the prevalence of food insecurity and very low food security in the U.S.

There are significant racial and ethnic disparities in food insecurity throughout the U.S (Figure 4). Notably, 22% of Black, non-Hispanic households experienced food insecurity, whereas 7% of white households did. See the section “Systemic Inequality and Structural Racism” for further discussion.

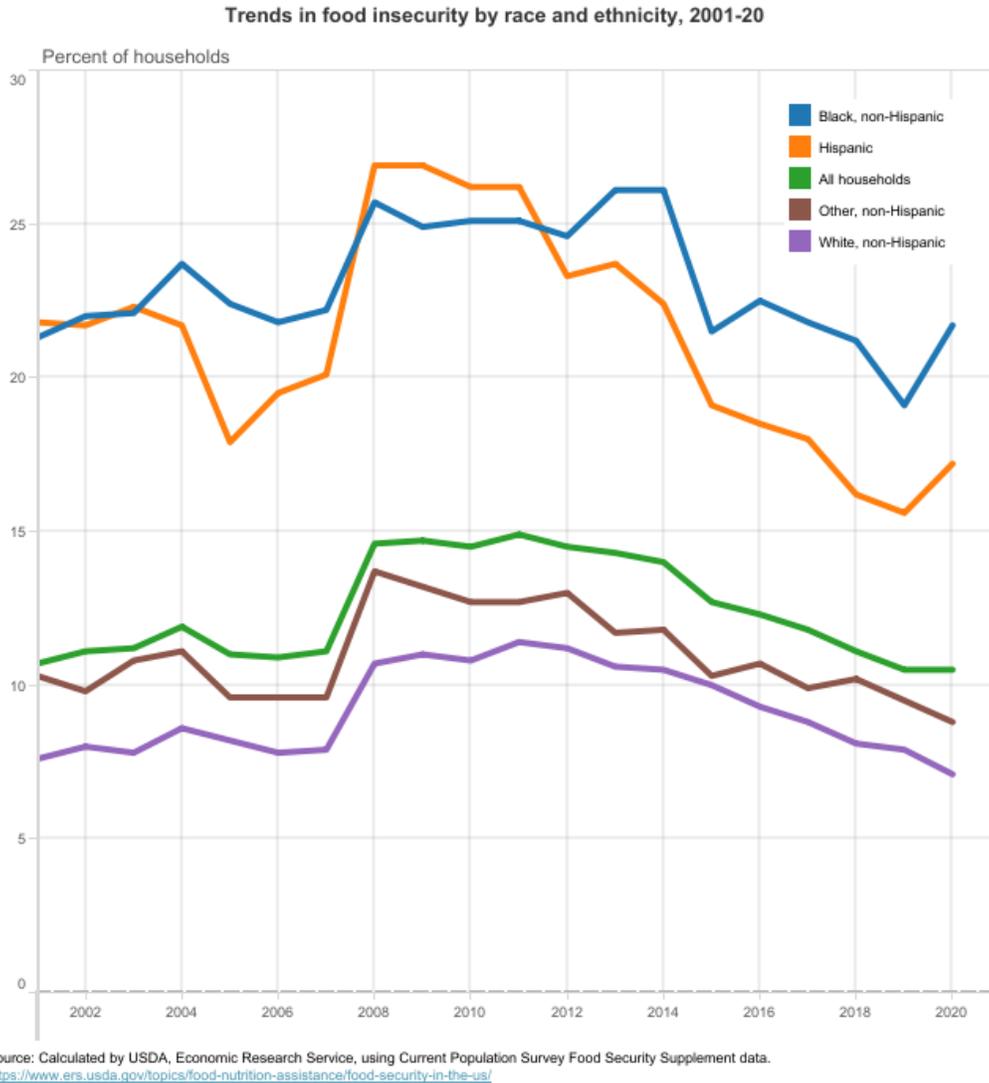


Figure 4: Trends in food security by race and ethnicity

Challenges and limitations with data collection and analysis make it difficult to understand the full picture and to provide the needed perspective -- are we making progress? Is there more work to do? Until we can more fully understand conditions locally, efforts will likely continue to fall short of meaningful progress and lasting change.

To read more about food insecurity trends at the national level, see Appendix B: Food Security Nationally.



## Food Security by Municipality

Poor food access and insecurity affects communities differently across Tompkins County. Using data from both census tract (small subdivisions of a county) and municipal levels, the map (Figure 5) below shows the percent of the population receiving SNAP benefits (American Community Survey 2010-2019), as well as the areas with low vehicle access, low income, and low food access (USDA Food Atlas Environment 2015). Figure 6, which is zoomed in on the City and Town of Ithaca, shows the number of households receiving SNAP along with areas with low vehicle access, low income, and low food access in the City of Ithaca. This depiction of need is based on the data that we have but is not necessarily the clearest picture of the actual need. Enrollment in SNAP benefits are often used as a proxy for food insecurity but equating SNAP enrollment to food insecurity is problematic because SNAP is designed as a buffer against food insecurity. High SNAP enrollment does indicate the presence of many low-income households within certain communities, but areas with lower SNAP enrollment may face much higher food insecurity because community members in these areas may struggle to access supportive resources related to food. Ultimately, more data is needed to fully understand food insecurity in our community.



### Demographics of Food Access and Insecurity in Tompkins County

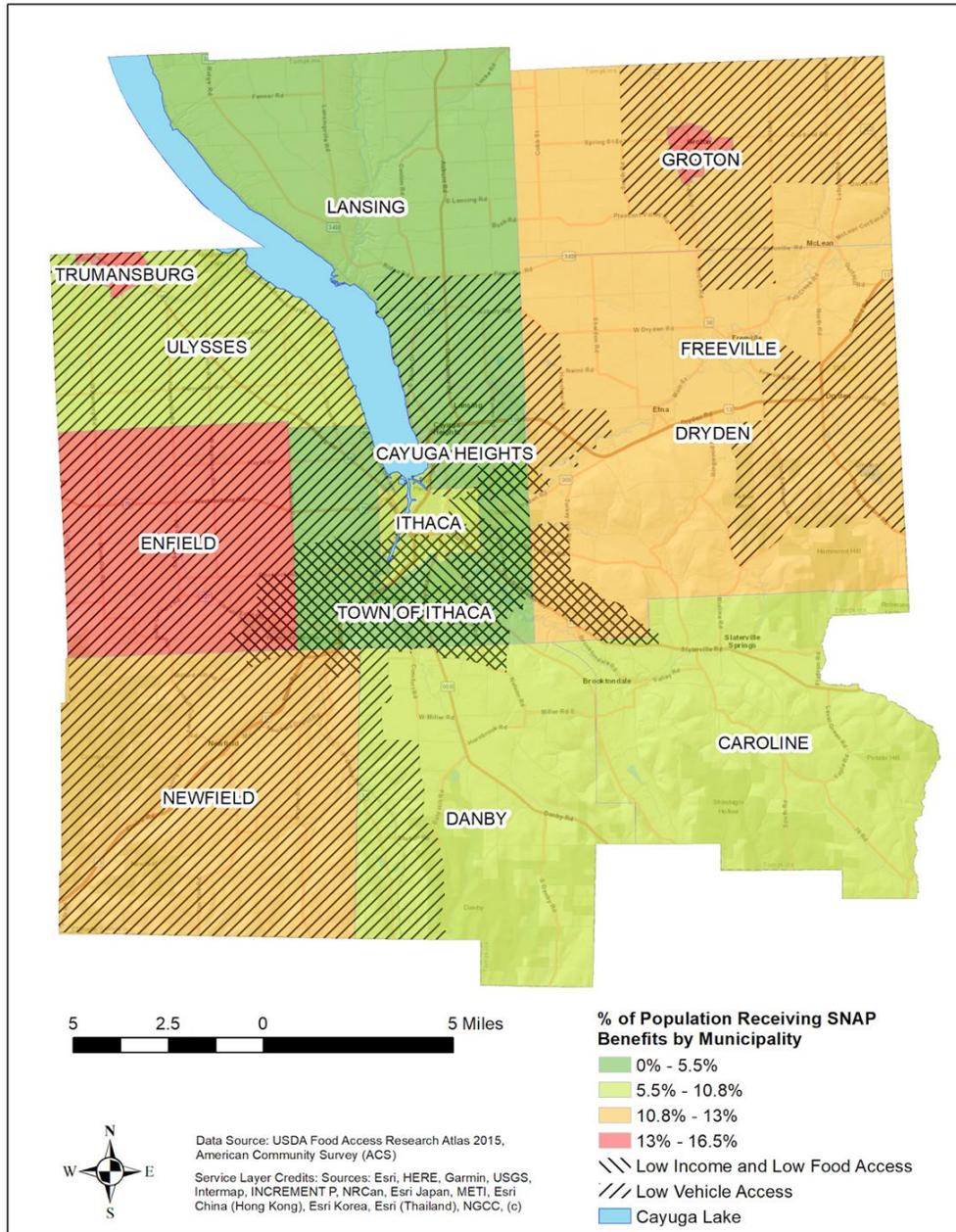


Figure 5: Map of food access and insecurity in Tompkins County



Term	Definition
Percent of Population Receiving SNAP Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Average percent of households within a municipality receiving SNAP benefits from 2010 - 2019</li></ul>
Low Income	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Poverty rate is 20 percent or greater OR</li><li>• Median family income is less than or equal to 80 percent of State-wide median family income OR</li><li>• Located in a metropolitan area with a median family income less than or equal to 80 percent of metropolitan area's median family income</li></ul>
Low Food Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• At least 500 people OR 33% of the tract must travel further than ½ mile to the nearest supermarket, supercenter, or large grocery store for an urban area or greater than 10 miles for a rural area</li></ul>
Low Vehicle Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• More than 100 households in the tract do not have a vehicle and are more than ½ mile from the nearest supermarket</li></ul>

### Demographics of Food Access and Insecurity in Tompkins County (Ithaca Zoom)

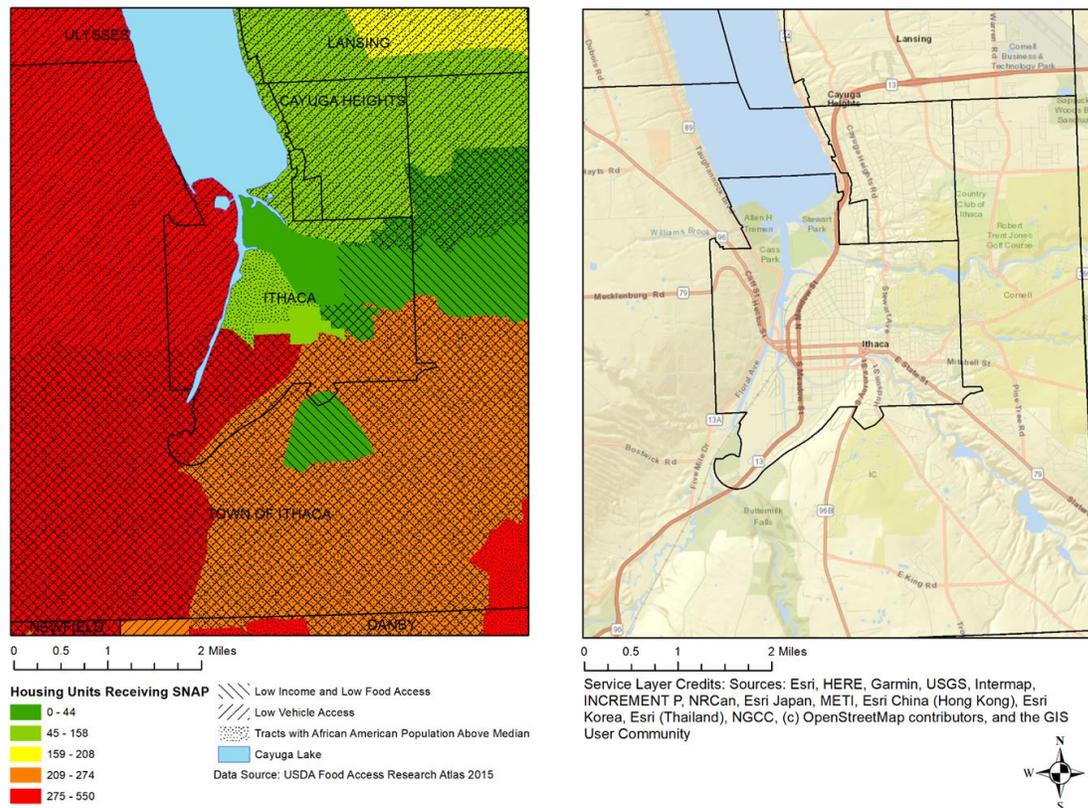


Figure 6: Zoomed in map of food access and insecurity in Tompkins County

The southern part of the Town of Ithaca contains several census tracts considered food deserts and with low vehicle access, however, these areas are close to Elmira Rd. and Meadow St., a corridor where supermarkets and supercenters such as Wegmans, Tops, and Walmart are located. Without vehicle access, residents still face barriers in accessing these locations. Tracts with low vehicle access covering the Village of Trumansburg, Village of Groton, and Town of Enfield are of particular concern as these municipalities have a low number of food retailers and require a vehicle to access food. Not surprisingly, the data shows many households at risk of food insecurity (indicated by SNAP benefits as a proxy for food insecurity).

### COVID-19 Pandemic Increased Food Needs

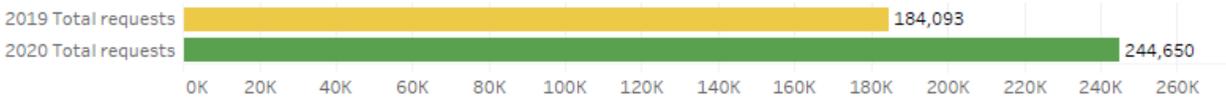


During the pandemic, food insecurity increased across the nation, worsening conditions for families and individuals previously unimpacted. Nationwide, Feeding America projects that there will be a slight improvement in 2021, with 42 million people (1 in 8) projected to be food insecure in 2021 down from 45 million in 2020, and 13 million children (1 in 6) projected to be food insecure in down from 15 million in 2020 (*The Impact of the Coronavirus on Food Insecurity in 2020 & 2021*).

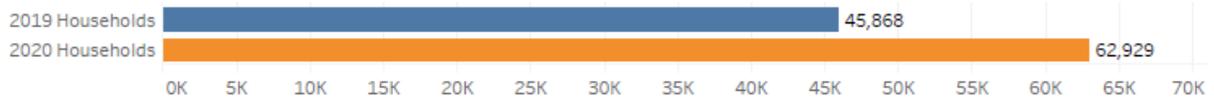
During the pandemic, data from the Food Bank of the Southern Tier (FBST) showed increased food needs from 2019 to 2020 (across all partners and programs, not just pantries). Figure 7 shows that, since 2019, partners of the FBST reported that household pantry use increased between 6% and 157% across the 17 FBST partnering pantries in Tompkins County (“ArcGIS - FDN Pantry Addresses”). Individual requests for food increased by 24.8% (60,577 requests), household requests increased by 27.1% (17,061 requests), and total pounds of food distributed increased by a staggering 45.4% (1,596,403 lbs.).

### FBST Data Requests for Food

#### Individual Requests for Food



#### Household Requests for Food



#### Total Pounds Distributed

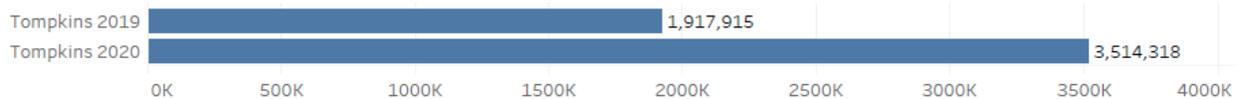


Figure 7: Food Bank of the Southern Tier requests for food.



Figure 8 shows changes in overall and child food insecurity pre-pandemic and projected food insecurity estimates in 2020 and 2021. During the pandemic, Tompkins County food insecurity is estimated to have increased 18% overall and 27% among children (“The Impact of Coronavirus on Food Insecurity”). Feeding America’s projections for 2020 indicate a substantially elevated risk of food insecurity among Tompkins County residents. This estimation is based on projected increases in unemployment and poverty. Fortunately, 2021 projections have declined, but estimates for Tompkins remain at 12.3% overall and 14.2% for children (“The Impact of Coronavirus on Food Insecurity”).

### Household Food Insecurity

Tompkins County NY

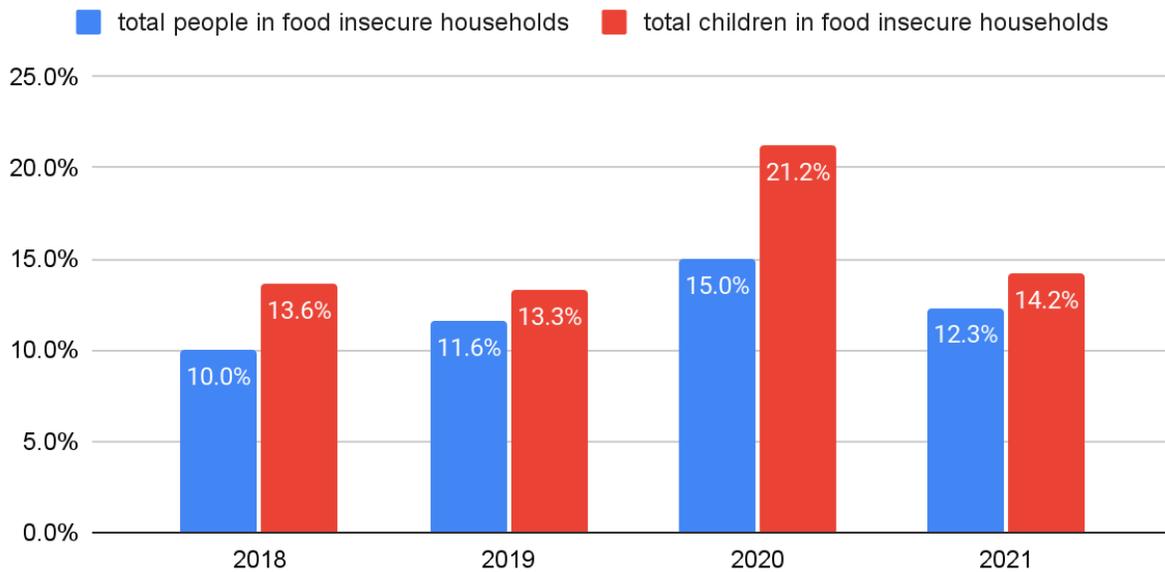


Figure 8: Household food insecurity in Tompkins County.

\*From Feeding America’s Mapping the Meal Gap Study (food insecurity refers to the USDA’s measurement of lack of access, at times, to enough food for an active, healthy lifestyle for all members of a given household, and limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods) <https://map.feedingamerica.org/>

\*\*From Feeding America’s analysis of food insecurity “Scenario C” (if unemployment increases by 7.6 percentage points and poverty increases by 4.8 percentage points, 17.1 million more people will experience food insecurity) <https://hungerandhealth.feedingamerica.org/2020/03/impact-coronavirus-food-insecurity/>



## Vulnerable and Underserved Populations in Tompkins County

Stakeholder interviews, survey respondents, and community focus groups identified the following vulnerable and underserved populations in our community. Overall, since the onset of COVID-19, people from all walks of life have faced food insecurity, making it difficult to identify those most vulnerable. This list is neither exhaustive nor is it supported or disproved by quantitative data.

- Unsheltered, unhoused people
- Migrant farmworkers
- Historically marginalized Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) residents (see below: Food Insecurity and Race in Tompkins County)
- Rural residents (especially those lacking transportation or living in low food access areas)
- Children 0-4
- K-12 students (school food is low quality)
- Seniors (especially those with limited income, transportation, and mobility)
- Families with children (especially with female heads of household)
- Families without children (because resources flow through schools, and seniors get covered by Meals on Wheels)
- Newly retired (drop in income, lack of savings, multigenerational families, and/or caring for grandchildren)
- People who can't plan, shop, cook (but live on their own)

In a recent study (2021) for the Food Bank of the Southern Tier (FBST), Horn Research, LLC surveyed 1,970 FBST members and mined and analyzed several data sources. They determined that 30% of the food insecure population in the region is underserved by the FBST. They identified the following vulnerable and underserved populations in the Southern Tier (of which Tompkins County is a part) (Horn):

- Tompkins Counties (compared with other Southern Tier counties)
- People with disabilities (especially those who are homebound)
- Low-income workers
- Children (especially those aged 0-4)
- Seniors (especially those who live alone or lack transportation)
- Immigrants and refugees



- Black community members, particularly in Tompkins County

## Community Reporting from Food Access Questionnaire

We conducted a food access questionnaire which paints a more detailed picture of food insecurity in Tompkins County in 2020. The questionnaire was distributed to food pantries, Mutual Aid cabinets, and other food assistance venues in every municipality throughout Tompkins County and had a total of 541 respondents. Not all respondents answered every question. Unsurprisingly, a large percentage of households demonstrated signs of food insecurity. Of the households providing income data and reporting signs of food insecurity: 149 respondents (46.9%) had reduced the amount of food eaten, 135 respondents (42.5%) had worried about not having enough food to eat, 80 respondents (25.2%) had run out of food, 97 respondents (30.5%) had borrowed money to buy food, and 102 respondents (32.1%) shared the effort or cost of getting food with others. These values are greater than the estimates from the *Feeding America* report. Our study also found that 231 respondents (72.6%) had reduced the quality of food eaten. These findings are consistent with the idea of “trading down” food quality in response to economic pressures (i.e. fresh to frozen to canned foods, or name brand to store brands). These coping strategies are also part of food insecurity and may occur before reducing food intake entirely.



As noted in Figure 9, lower income households, particularly in the \$15-50K household income range, were the most likely to report signs of food insecurity compared to households above \$50K household income range. There was also differential use of coping strategies for people with different financial situations (Figure 10):

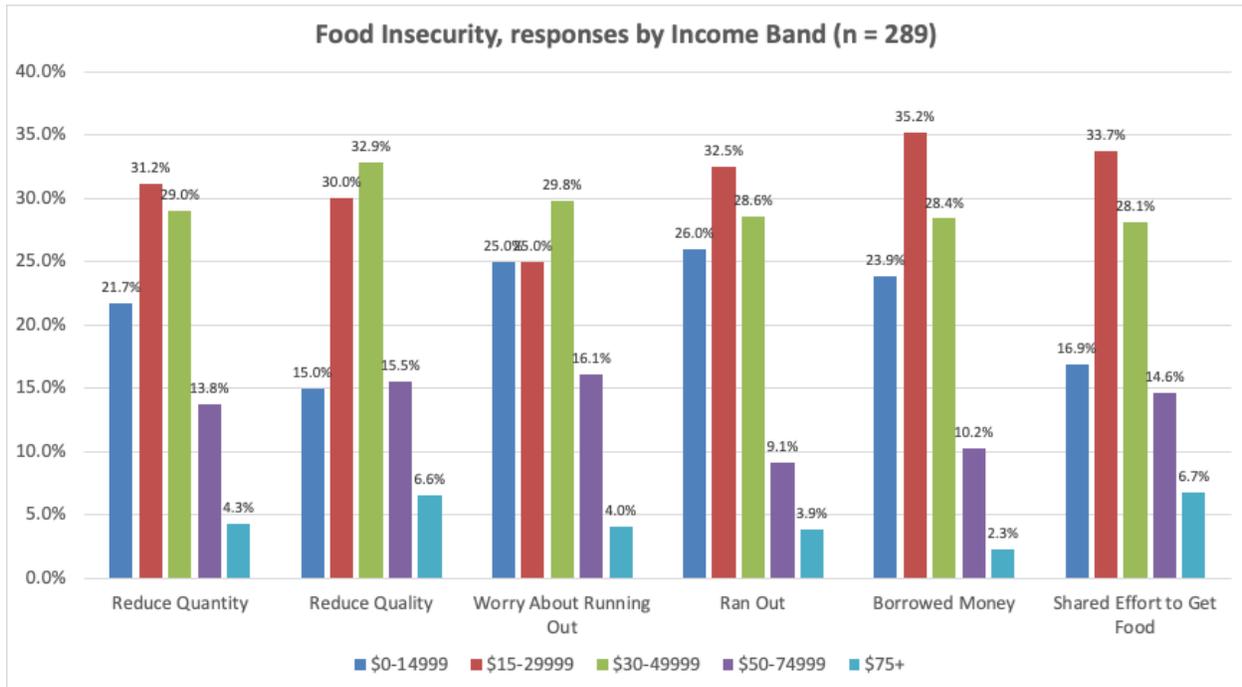


Figure 9: Food insecurity by income

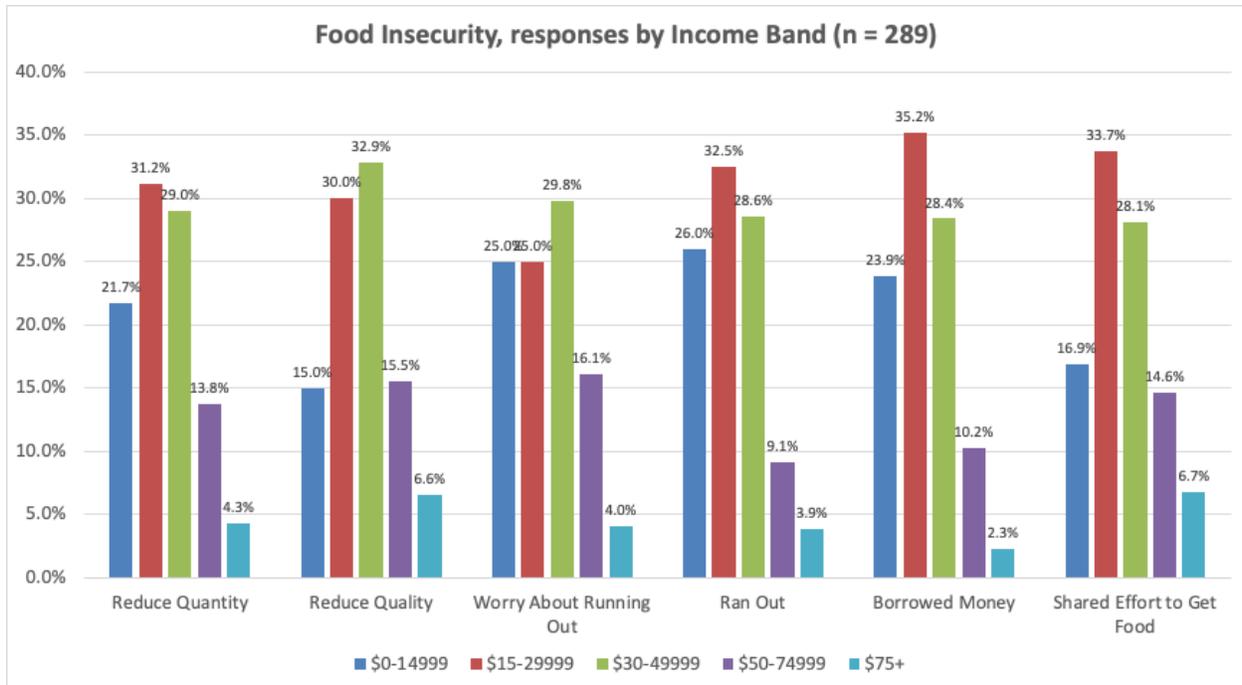


Figure 10: Food Insecurity, responses by Income Band



### Food sources

In the food access questionnaire respondents were asked about how they got food in the past 12 months. Food retail overwhelmingly dominated food sourcing, with respondents procuring either prepared food from restaurants or shopping at grocery stores/supercenters (Figure 11).

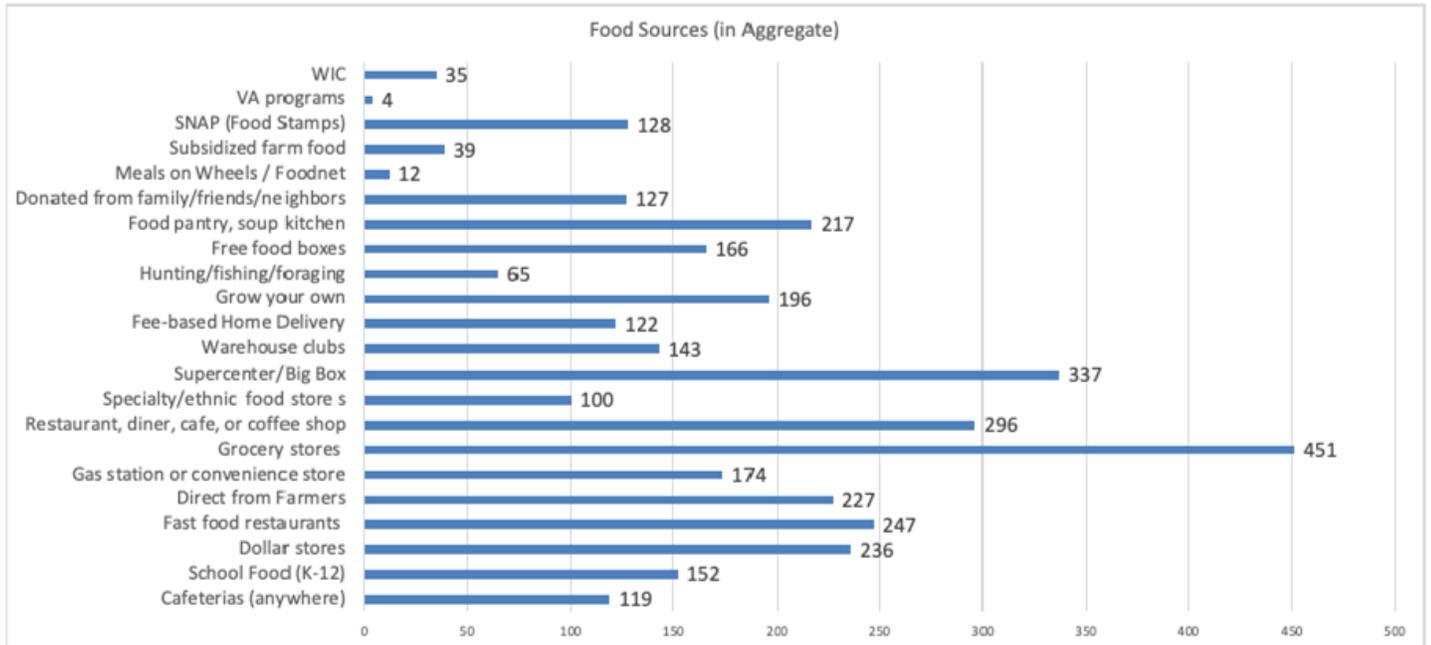


Figure 11: Food sources in aggregate

Figure 12, Figure 13, and Figure 14 (from the [Tompkins COVID Food Task Force End of Year 2020 Survey](#)) show that when separated by income, income, use of emergency food system resources (e.g. food pantries, soup kitchens), food assistance, and government benefit programs was higher among lower income households than higher income households. Lower income households were also more likely to shop at dollar stores than higher-income households. Households with higher income ate out at restaurants, diners, and coffee shops more often than those with lower income, whereas fast food consumption was similar across income groups except for the lowest income group (\$0-15K) which had a lower prevalence of fast food consumption. Household gardening was greater for populations at a higher income level but foraging/hunting/fishing was relatively even between groups. Higher income households also frequented warehouse clubs, used fee-based home delivery services, or made direct purchases from farmers (e.g. Farmers' Markets, farm stands, CSAs, etc.) compared to lower income households in Tompkins County. Participation in school food and gas



station/convenience store purchases was relatively equal between income groups.

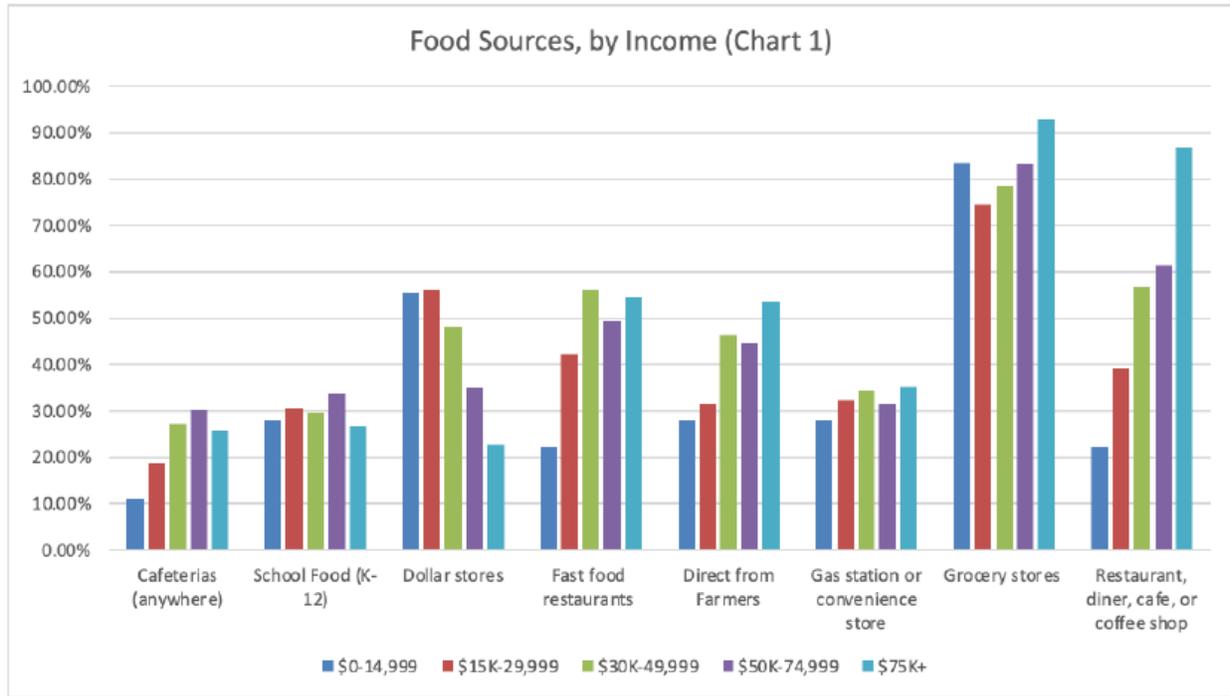


Figure 12: Food sources by income part 1 of 3.

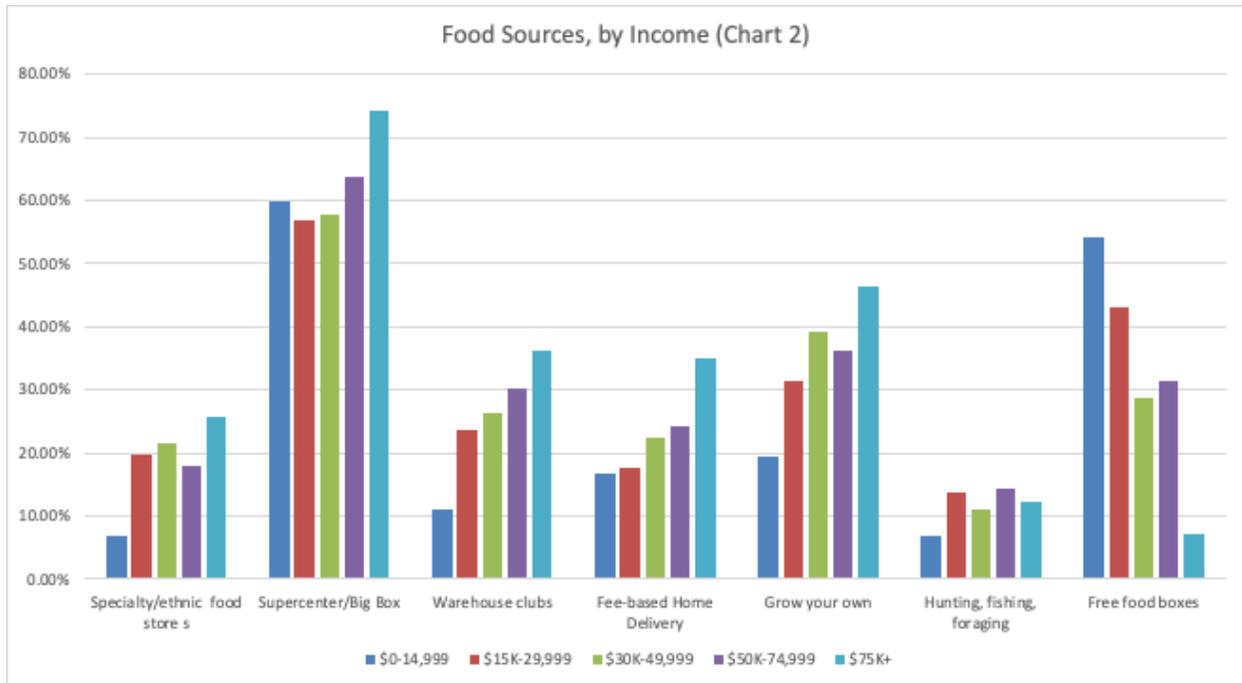


Figure 13: Food sources by income part 2 of 3.

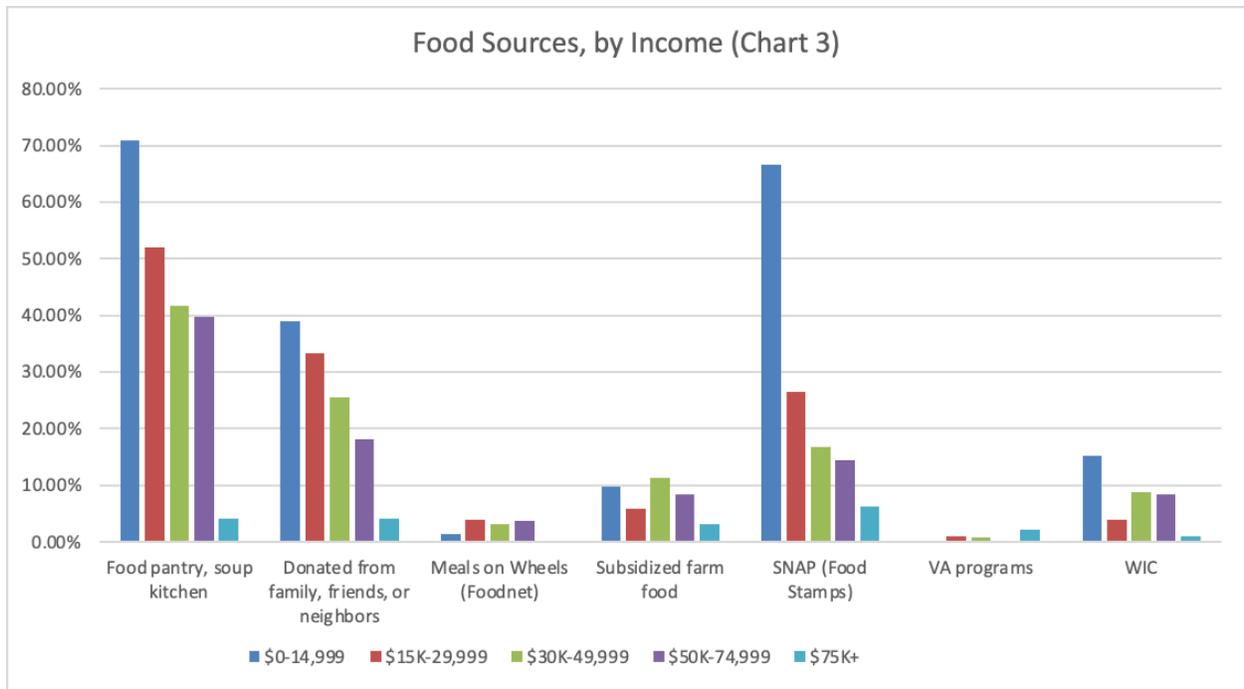


Figure 14: Food sources by income part 3 of 3.



# Food Insecurity Exists Both in and Outside of Poverty

## What is the poverty line in 2020?

~ \$25,100 or **\$12 per hour** for a family of four  
(*Food Insecurity and Poverty in the United States*)

While related, food insecurity and poverty are not necessarily experienced at the same time by the same households. The federal poverty line is far lower than the cost of living, meaning many people living above the poverty line experience inadequate living conditions, food insecurity, and other disparities. The living wage in Tompkins County in 2021 is \$15.32/hr (*2021 Living Wage Study*), \$8.93 above the poverty line for an individual, or \$3.37 above the poverty line for a family of 4 (*2021 Poverty Guidelines*). Although median income in the United States is increasing, millions of people remain food insecure because they **earn too much to qualify for federal nutrition assistance through programs, such as SNAP or WIC, but too little to cover costs of the food they need**. As of 2018, 59% of the estimated 40 million people living with food insecurity earned incomes above the poverty line (Figure 15).

Food insecurity and poverty are not always experienced by the same families

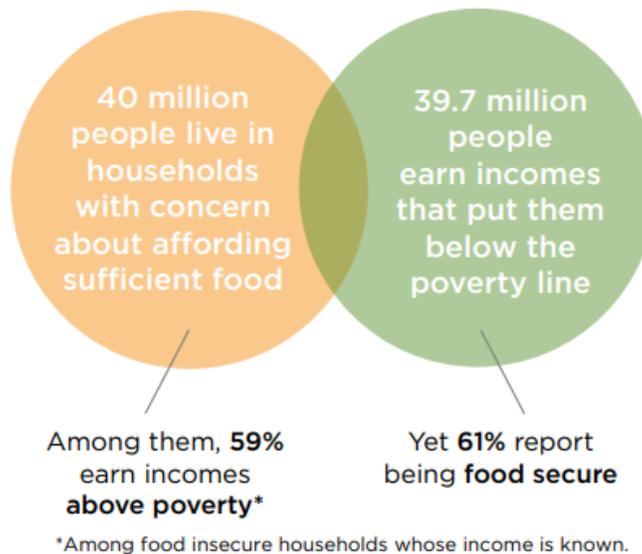


Figure 15: Food insecurity and poverty (from *Food Insecurity and Poverty in the United States*).



# Challenges

We gathered existing data from local, state, and national sources to help paint a clearer picture of the food access and security challenges facing residents. We also interviewed, held focus groups, went door-to-door, and connected with community members and leaders working on and experiencing these challenges in their own lives.

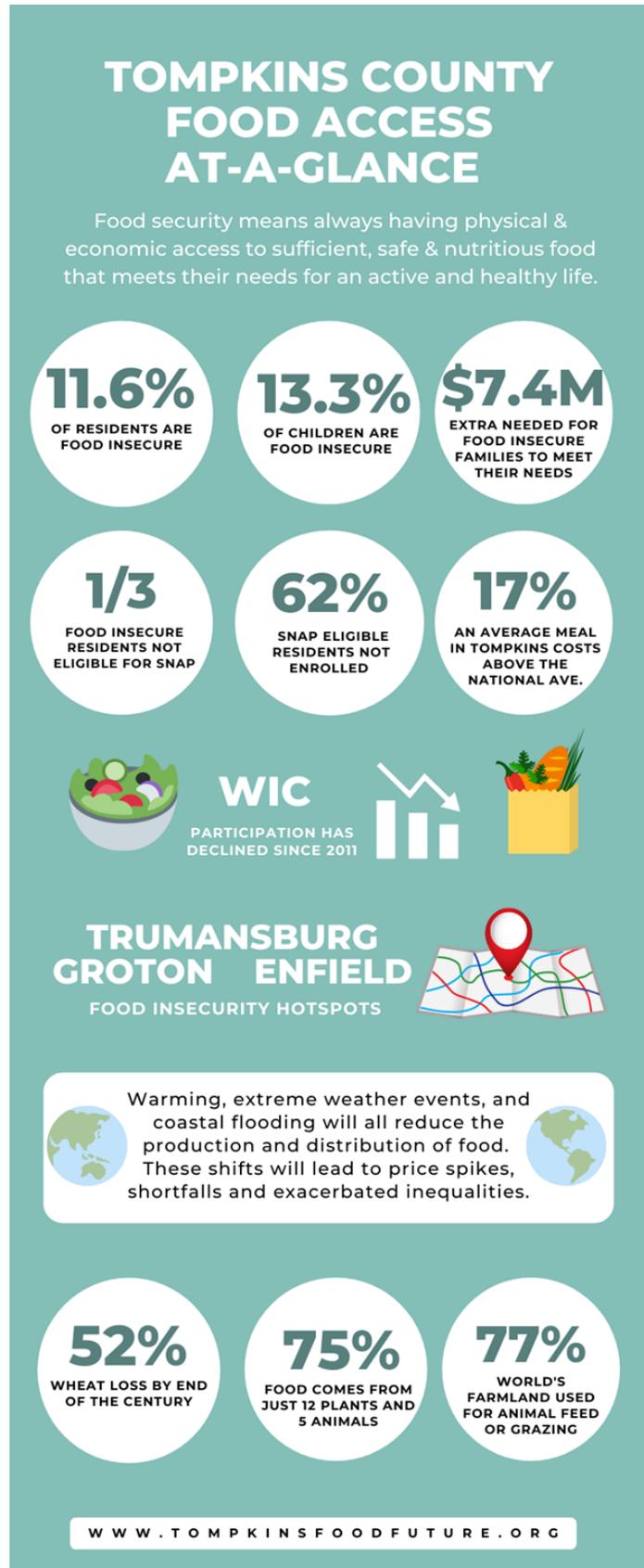
What follows is an overview of these challenges and barriers, along with opportunities to address these challenges as described by stakeholders.

Local organizations, pantries, and individuals have worked hard for years to distribute food and resources to those in need, accelerating their efforts throughout the pandemic. The pandemic brought on a spike in that need, and people rose to the challenge, forging new connections and collaborations along the way – a COVID silver-lining that many hope will continue.

To understand why existing services and programs are not enough to reduce food insecurity, we must look at the challenges highlighted by stakeholders and community members throughout the engagement process.

# At-a-Glance

Figure 16: Infographic for Tompkins County food access.





The following estimates are derived from the Feeding America's annual *Map the Meal Gap* report, an analysis of closely linked indicators to food insecurity (poverty, homeownership, unemployment, disability, etc.).

**Average Meal Cost in Tompkins:** \$3.68 (in 2019 dollars)

This number reflects the average meal cost in Tompkins County, which is **\$0.55 higher than the national average of \$3.13**. Food prices are an important component of cost-of-living, and the high cost of food contributes to food insecurity. For residents struggling to afford housing, utilities, transportation, and other basic necessities, high-cost food creates an additional burden.

**Food Budget Shortfall:** \$7,493,000 (2019)

This number reflects the additional spending needed by food insecure families in Tompkins to meet their needs. Where should those dollars come from?

**SNAP eligibility:** 67% of food insecure residents of Tompkins County are eligible for SNAP

SNAP is a key tool in the fight against food insecurity, but of food insecure Tompkins County residents only 67% are eligible for SNAP. This presents a problem because SNAP, which could help support people who are food insecure, is not available to them. Eligibility for programs like SNAP, Women, Infants and Children (WIC), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and other government support is based on household size and income level. In Tompkins County, **a third of those who are food insecure are not eligible for food assistance**. This is similar to what we see at the national level, where there is a gap between resources available and eligibility among individuals who are food insecure.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>These estimates are from Feeding America and are based on analysis of closely linked indicators to food insecurity (poverty, homeownership, unemployment, disability, etc). For more on methodology, visit the [Map the Meal Gap](#) report. Notably, *Map the Meal Gap* data cannot be compared year-to-year due to recent changes in methodology. Each year provides a snapshot of current conditions.



## Affordability

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*“None of you know what it’s like...to sit there and say, **I’ve got \$2.50 to my name**, so I can’t buy that gallon of milk, b/c I need to be able to pay for parking. People need something better than cookies, processed food.”*

*- Food insecure resident, Groton, NY*

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The cost of food (especially nutritious food) remains one of the biggest challenges for individuals and families. Anyone living on a fixed income might struggle to meet all their expenses. In 2019, the lowest income families in the US spent 36% of their income on food, whereas the highest income families spent only 8% (*USDA ERS - Food Prices and Spending*). High-cost food places an additional burden on low-income residents already struggling to afford housing, childcare, transportation, and other necessities. This is exacerbated by the lack of a livable wage for many workers.

Families— and single mothers especially— face the compounding issues of time, stress, and convenience on top of affordability. Parents don’t want to prepare food kids might not eat and have that food go to waste. The stress on families makes it hard to prioritize healthy food which can take a long time to prepare, and often requires learning new skills. Many struggle with basic budget limitations and difficult decisions— for example, a person might say “I don’t have gas money to drive to the grocery store today.”

Among those reporting barriers to food access (Figure 17) within the Food Access Questionnaire we conducted, **money was cited as the greatest barrier** followed by dietary restrictions, time to cook, and transportation.

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*“I want to see people able to eat the food they want to but can’t afford.  
**Most people want to eat well.**”*

*- Rural food pantry director in Tompkins County*

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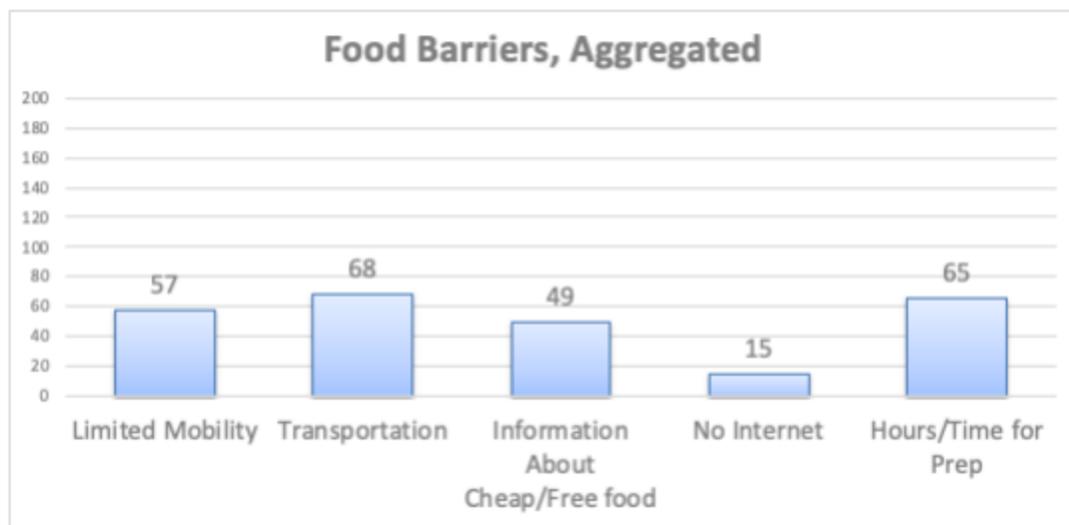
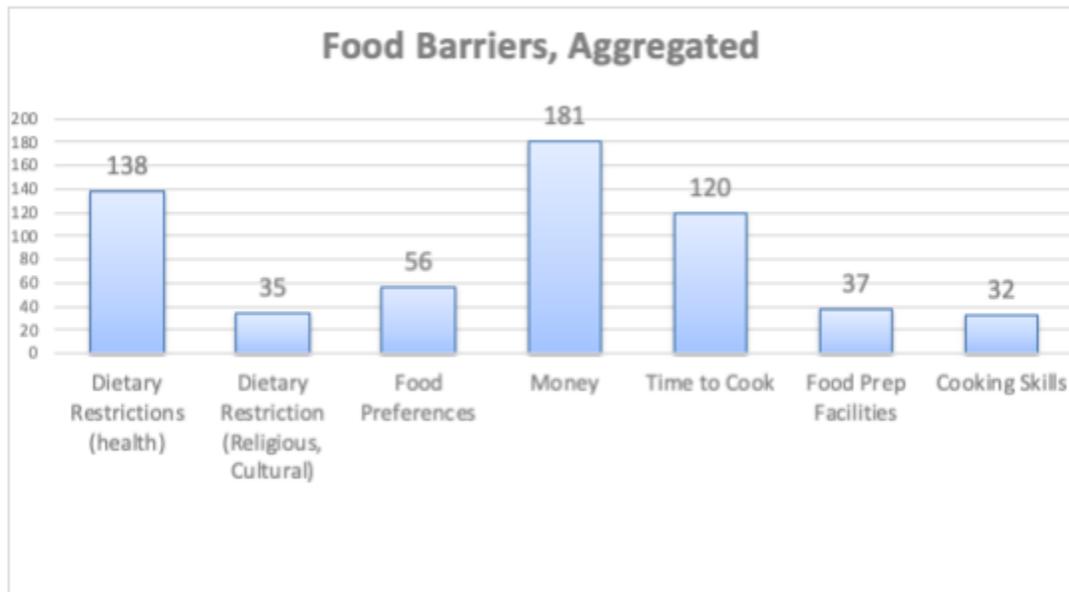


Figure 17: Food barriers aggregated, parts 1 and 2 (from the [Tompkins COVID Food Task Force End of Year 2020 Survey](#)).

## Federal Food Access Programs

This section describes programs available to help offset the cost of food and improve access to



nutritious, appropriate food for individuals and families. It also describes what we know about current participation levels, eligibility requirements, and the barriers that keep people from accessing these resources. See Appendix C: Federal, state, and local food assistance programs for more background and information.

### Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the largest federal assistance program in the U.S. It has been shown to increase food security, improve nutritional outcomes and reduce healthcare costs. (“SNAP Is Linked with Improved Nutritional Outcomes and Lower Health Care Costs”) This is achieved by providing funds to low income households to purchase food at grocery stores, convenience stores, and farmers’ markets. In Tompkins, SNAP participation varies by who the household is comprised of (Figure 18).

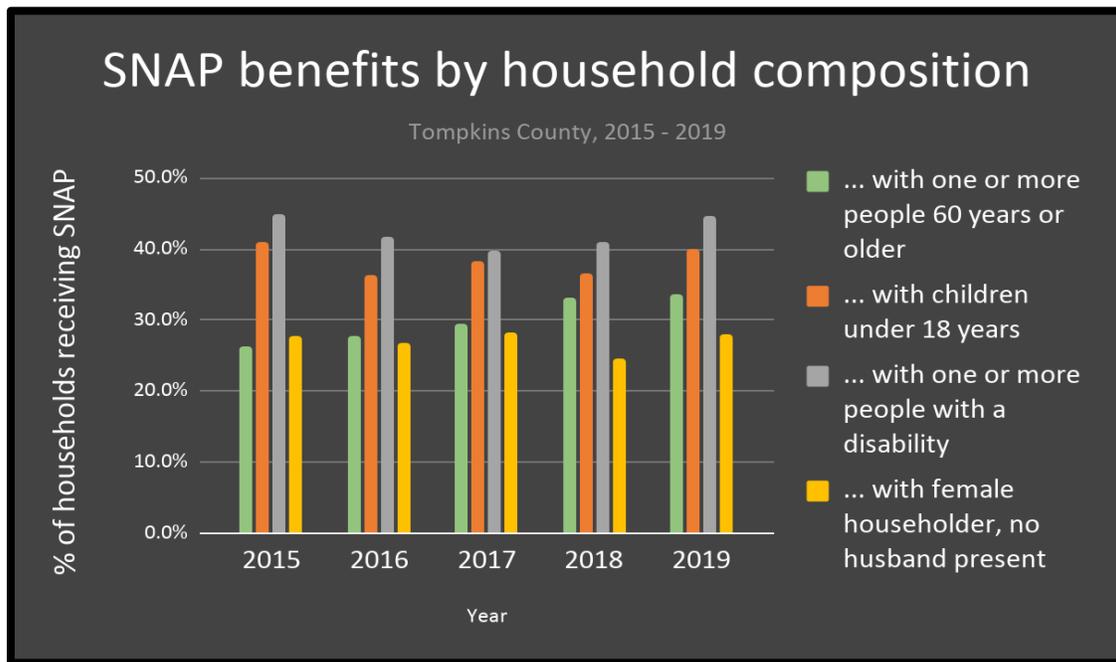


Figure 18: SNAP benefits by household composition.

Between 2010 and 2019, the percentage of households receiving SNAP benefits was highest in 2014; however, this trend has leveled off over the last 5 years (See Appendix D: SNAP



Trends and Demographics). As of 2019, the total percentage of households receiving SNAP benefits is relatively consistent with the percentage observed in 2010 (around 7.5%) To see this breakdown by municipality from 2010 - 2019, see Appendix D).

Households in which one or more residents lived with disability consistently represented the highest percentage of SNAP recipients between 2015 and 2019 (Figure 16). This group was closely followed by households with children under 18 years (Figure 16). These two groups regularly interact with caseworkers and other government employees that may direct them to enroll in SNAP.

### Racial Disparities in Food Assistance Enrollment

There are racial/ethnic disparities in food assistance enrollment in Tompkins County. While the share of white SNAP recipients (79.5%) approximates the share of white individuals in the total Tompkins County population (80.5%), African Americans make up a greater share of SNAP recipients (12.7%) than they do the general population in Tompkins County (4.0%) (Figure 19 vs Figure 20). Asian Americans make up a lower share (1.7%) than they do in the general population in Tompkins County (9.6%). This difference can be attributed to income disparities, cultural differences in decisions to enroll, and the frequency of interactions with government officials who may refer individuals to SNAP and/or WIC enrollment.

## Racial demographics

Tompkins County, averaged 2010 - 2019

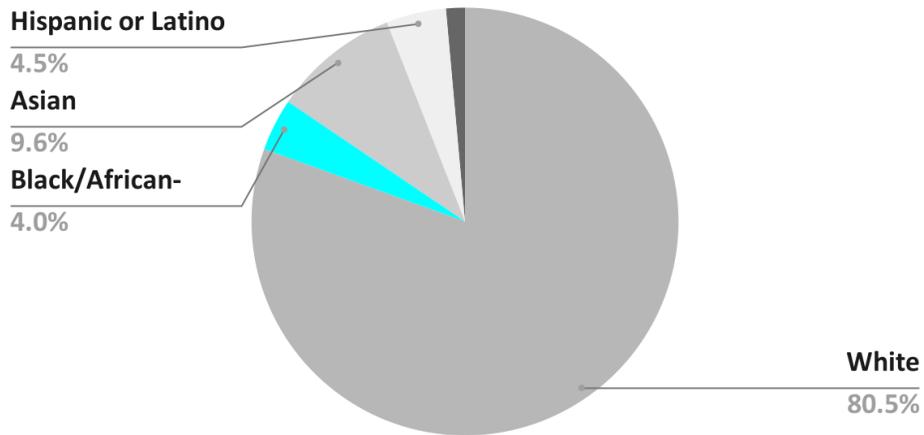


Figure 19: Racial demographics of Tompkins County.

## SNAP Recipients by Race

Tompkins County, averaged 2010 - 2019

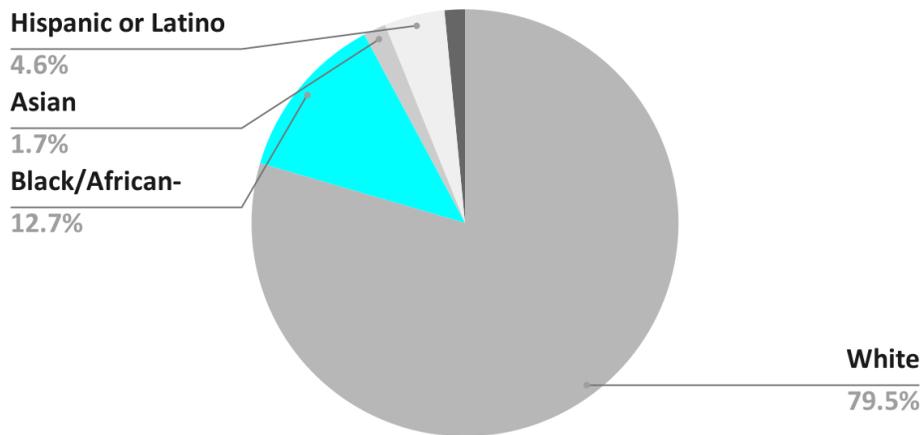


Figure 20: SNAP recipients by race.

In 2019, 7,381 Tompkins County residents participated in SNAP, while 19,517 had income at or below 125% of the federal poverty level (Zielinski). This means that as few as 38% of eligible residents received SNAP benefits in 2019 (Figure 21).

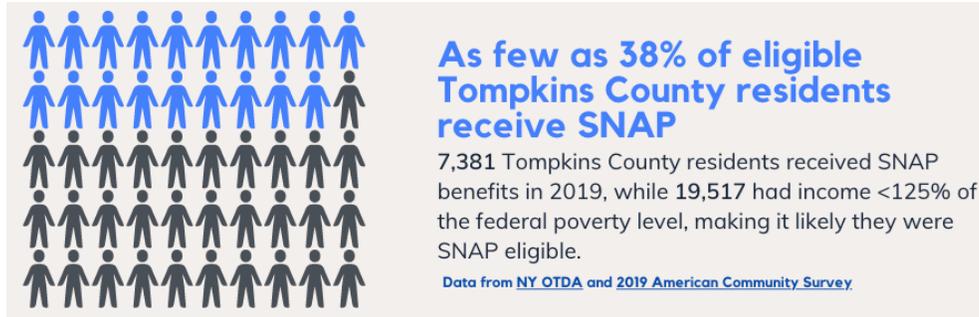


Figure 21: SNAP eligibility vs use in Tompkins County.

Local SNAP participants surveyed in 2021 via an electronic Community Questionnaire cited the following barriers to SNAP enrollment: 1) restrictive eligibility requirements prevent food insecure individuals from being able to Enroll in SNAP, 2) a complicated application and recertification process prevents the working poor and those with lower literacy from applying, 3) privacy concerns and distrust make participants hesitant to enroll or renew. Other common barriers include poor interactions with County Health and Human Services workers, lack of application assistant support, anti-immigration laws, as well as political and racial ideologies (Hallas).

### Women, Infants and Children (WIC)

The WIC Program is a federally funded Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children. WIC’s mission is to safeguard the health of low-income women, infants, and children up to age 5 who are at nutritional risk. This mission is carried out by providing nutritious foods to supplement diets, providing nutrition counseling and education (including breastfeeding promotion and support), referrals to health care providers and other community/ social services.

Overall WIC participation and enrollment has continued to decline nationally since 2011. Most state agencies in the US experienced declines between 2017 and 2018. Tompkins County WIC enrollment has mirrored the overall decline. Enrollment in Tompkins County, which varies from month-to-month averages, between 1,115 and 1,150 participants. Participation averages range from 1,020 to 1,050 on a monthly basis. According to Hunger Solutions NY, only 31 - 40% of eligible women and children in Tompkins County were enrolled as of 2018 (“Food Insecurity and Federal Nutrition Program Participation”).

Commonly cited barriers to participation in the program include negative shopping experiences



and low perceived value of the foods included in the food package, especially relative to the time commitment associated with participating. Unlike SNAP, WIC's food package includes a pre-approved list of foods that may not meet every family's preferences. It is worth noting that benefits used to be distributed via paper "checks" to be redeemed at stores, and now are redeemable through an Electronic Benefits Transfer system to work more like a debit card and function more like SNAP (Horn, 2017).

## National School Lunch Program (NSLP)

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is another important resource for children and their families. In participating schools, these subsidies provide free or low-cost school meals to students if their family's income is below 130% of poverty, and 185% of poverty, respectively. The percentage of students participating is a measure of poverty and its concentration in public schools. In Tompkins County, the need for free and reduced price lunch has been increasing. Between 2006 and 2016, the percentage of students K-12 enrolled in the NSLP jumped by 5%, from approximately 35% to 40% (See Appendix C: Need for Free & Reduced Price Lunch). It is important to note that since this data was released, these numbers would be even higher, and the need even greater, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, however since schools switched to universal feeding programs, we will not have access to accurate data for that period.

There is variation in NSLP enrollment across Tompkins County school districts. The Tompkins-Seneca-Tioga Board of Cooperative Educational Services (TST BOCES) has the highest enrollment (71%) (Horn, 2017), followed by Newfield (55%), Dryden (46%), and Groton (44%) (Figure 22).



### Free Lunch Eligibility by District

Tompkins County 2016 - 2017 school year

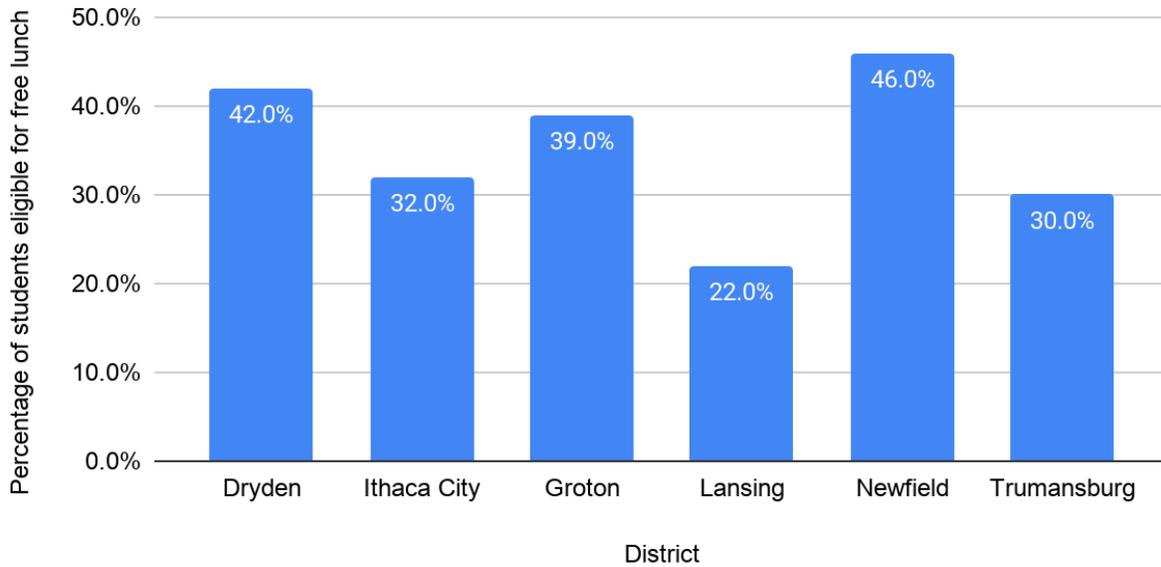


Figure 22: Free lunch eligibility by school district (To access data source for “Free Lunch Eligibility by District: [“Districts - NYSED Data Site”](#) - Find the desired district, select “report card” then select “free and reduced price lunch”).

According to the 2017 Park Foundation “[Needs and Asset Assessment of Child Nutrition in Tompkins County](#),” (Horn, 2017) conducted by Lisa Horn, while enrollment in NSLP is relatively high, actual participation in meals varies substantially. Here are findings from that study, which surveyed 640 parents, 364 students mostly in the Ithaca City and Lansing school districts:

- 19% of children at risk of being food insecure (more pre-packaged and fast food, less eating together, fewer fruits and veg than food secure families)
- 28% are overweight or obese (NYS 34%)
- 29% said expense was barrier to eating healthy
- 29% said time was barrier to eating healthy
- 24% said kids don’t like healthy food
- 18% of kids birth - 17 received SNAP (2015)

Participation in school feeding is still challenging for many districts, who aim for full



enrollment. Many eligible families do not enroll their children and do not respond to notices from the schools. Local districts can help by normalizing and encouraging participation, thus increasing the likelihood of schools qualifying for the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). CEP permits eligible schools to provide meal service to all students at no charge, regardless of economic status, while reducing burdens at the household and local levels by eliminating the need to obtain eligibility data, like SNAP and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). For example, linking the SNAP application on a school website is an impactful message coming from a trusted institution. This opportunity can increase SNAP participation among families with children and increase the potential for a school or district's Categorical Eligibility determination making the program available to all students. Schools and school districts can share the County Nutrition Outreach and Education Program (NOEP) contact on every school/district's nutrition page and in regular communications to parents. Schools may need administrative support when attempting to increase participation and eventually applying for CEP. For more information on how schools operate their programs, please see our "Food Environment" section of the report.

## State and Local Assistance Programs

Residents in Tompkins County can participate in several state and local programs designed to offset the cost of quality food. These programs are funded either by the State of New York or local foundations and donors. See Appendix C: State and local assistance programs for a description of the following programs:

Fresh Connect

Farmers Market Nutrition Program

Healthy Food For All

The Youth Farm

Food As Medicine Tompkins

Although this suite of nutrition incentive programs available to residents in Tompkins County, farmers, market managers and the public can also encounter challenges in differentiating between these programs and the services they offer and knowing when they become available and who qualifies. CCE Tompkins works with the markets, Office of the Aging, and the WIC office every year for promotion and education but it does not reach all eligible residents.



## Local Emergency Food Services

Free grocery options are available to households who need support meeting their food needs through 17+ pantries and subsidized or free meal services throughout Tompkins County. Each pantry is independently operated within its community, and most, though not all, obtain food through partnerships with the [Food Bank of the Southern Tier](#) (FBST), which distributed 1.9 million pounds of food to 25 partner agencies across Tompkins County in 2019. Pantries also receive a small amount of funding each year from Tompkins County, as well as donations (food and financial) from individuals, businesses, and rescued food through the Friendship Donations Network. [Friendship Donations Network](#) (FDN) works with many agencies to rescue donated food and make it available at distribution sites. See the Food Waste baseline assessment for more on FDN. Depending on the individual pantry or program, food may be available to anyone, ‘no questions asked,’ or may have some eligibility requirement attached (income, residence, etc).

Advantages of partnering with FBST include access to lower cost wholesale purchasing, technical support from FBST staff, networking and training with peers, and automatic inclusion on resource directories. Any pantries or distribution sites that do not work with FBST have to do much more independent organizing to form partnerships, obtain additional resources, and get the word out about their services. FBST’s recent assessment of underserved populations includes the recommendation to pursue non-traditional partnerships with organizations serving underserved populations to increase reach (Horn Research). In addition to their brick and mortar pantry partners, FBST also operates pop-up Mobile Food Pantry distributions and supplies food for innovative programs like Kids’ Farmers Markets or free grocery programs at schools.

In addition to food pantries, there are now over [60 Mutual Aid food sharing](#) cabinets throughout the county, including cooler and fridge spaces for perishable items. Mutual Aid Tompkins is “neighbors supporting neighbors in the spirit of solidarity to meet survival needs, as opposed to non-profit/charity or government work where folx are dependent on a central organization. We recognize that the community knows best what its needs are and how to meet them. .Mutual Aid supports all our neighbors, but we recognize current and historical oppression and want to prioritize meeting the needs of our most vulnerable neighbors including “*the poor, sick, elderly, disabled, undocumented, queer, Black, Brown, Indigenous*



and/or people of color” ([Mutual Aid Tompkins](#)).

Food cabinets are regularly stocked with non-perishable food items and are open to anyone. Mutual Aid Tomkins maintains a Facebook group to provide updated information on how to donate to, use, and host cabinets. A map of food sharing cabinet locations can be accessed [here](#).



## Transportation to Food Sources

A spectrum of transportation-related issues disrupts food access and security, including not owning a vehicle (over 5,500 residents according to 2015 USDA Food Environment Atlas), lacking reliable access to a vehicle or ride, inaccessibility of bus routes and times, the hardship of transporting groceries on a bus, and limited food delivery.

Throughout our process, transportation was the most frequently cited barrier to food security. Local residents face a wide spectrum of transportation-related issues that disrupt food access and security. Public transportation poses accessibility challenges - bus routes must be close to one's home, run at the appropriate times, and take people where they need to go. Even when these conditions are met, transporting a month's worth of groceries procured at a food pantry can be an arduous task.

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*“So many people take the bus, and you don’t walk away with a small amount of food... 3 big boxes of food... people get a lot of food.”*

*- Non-profit and food pantry director, City of Ithaca*

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Increasing reliance on ride services like Uber is costly and spending \$30 or more for a trip to the grocery store is unsustainable for food insecure residents.

Transportation and food insecurity intersect in a significant way in our rural communities. Lower income and other marginalized residents can't afford to live downtown where retail and emergency sources of food are most accessible. Unmet need continues; people who could benefit are not getting to pantries, highlighting the need for delivery of food, especially in rural areas. Many pantries have increased their delivery services in response (especially during COVID), but that continues to place an already outsized burden on volunteers, many of whom are food insecure themselves.



## Lessons from the Food Access Questionnaire

Those reporting a transportation barrier to accessing food were asked an additional question to identify how they access their food sources. Figure 23 show that buses and sharing a ride with someone else were the most common ways, followed by walking.

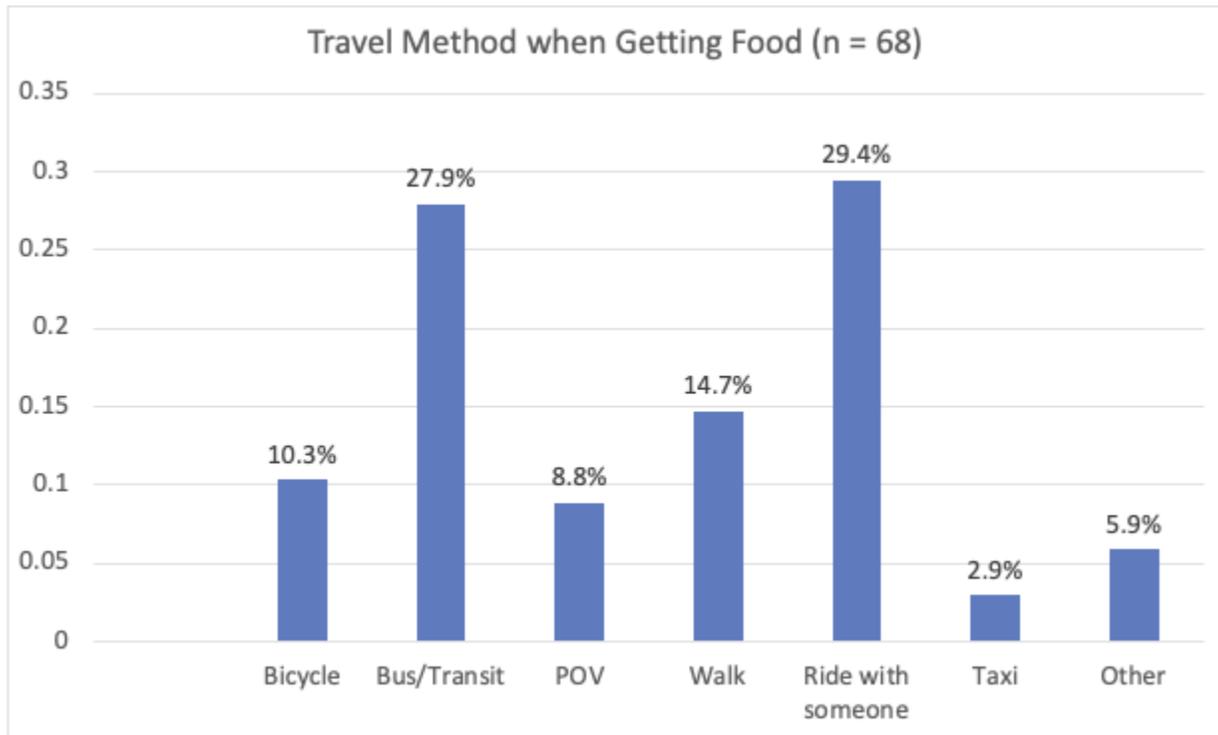


Figure 23: Travel method when getting food (from the [Tompkins COVID Food Task Force End of Year 2020 Survey](#)).

Responses to the “Other” category included:

- Not driving in inclement weather or when health problems are exacerbated
- Delivery
- A combination of bus and walking
- Not traveling for food at all

## Systemic Inequality and Structural Racism



Food is a solution to hunger and food insecurity in the most temporary of ways. A box of free food doesn't get at the underlying causes and is not a substitute for structural changes at the political, societal, and economic level. One of the most fundamental problems is that there is no guarantee that a market economy will generate a distribution of income that provides enough income for all to purchase the food they need.

When asked about the key barriers to food security, many Tompkins County respondents described systemic issues. Systemic challenges are inherently ongoing and interrelated rather than the product of isolated, specific, or individual factors. Changes to structures, systems and organizations can potentially alleviate those problems. Food insecurity is inherently tied to other structural factors: inadequate wages, intergenerational poverty, racism and classism, mental health and physical disabilities, and housing and transportation insecurity. Racial disparities in local food assistance enrollment show higher levels of food insecurity among Black residents in Tompkins County (Figure 20), which is layered on top of the lowest rates of income and highest rates of poverty in the county.

Systemic factors are often referred to as the "social determinants of health". They are conditions in the environments in which people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks." (["Social Determinants of Health" - Healthy People, 2020](#)).

Respondents highlighted the following as root causes of food insecurity:

- income inequality
- economic insecurity
- lack of living wage
- intergenerational poverty
- racism and classism
- mental health, disability, and mobility issues
- housing insecurity
- transportation insecurity
- affordability of healthy, nutritious food

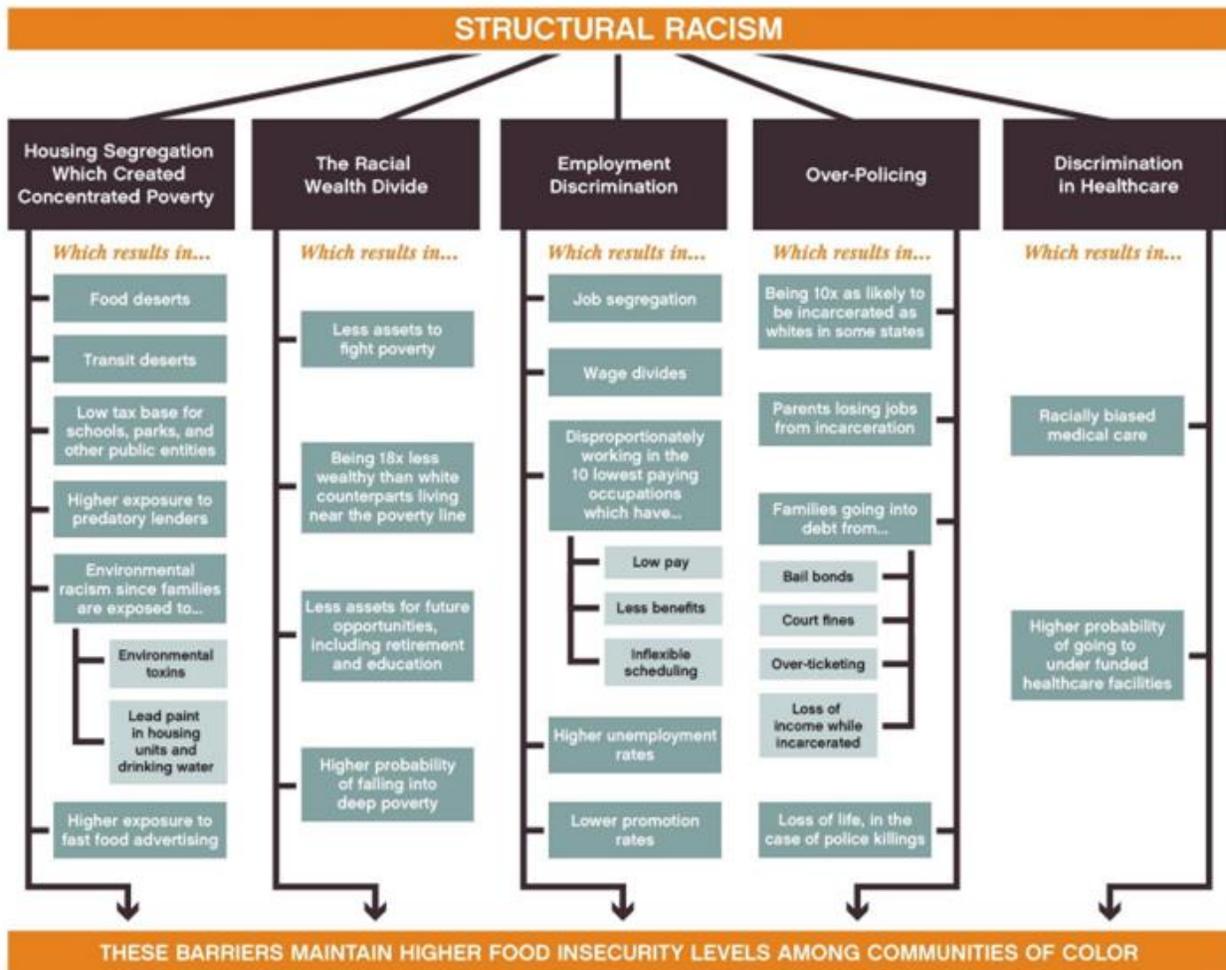


Figure 24: Impacts and barriers faced by systemically oppressed communities based on their race or ethnicity, and the higher rates of food insecurity that result from these systems. (Lacko and Henchy)

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“Structural racism can continue to damage lives simply as a by-product of the everyday workings of society. **This means that structural racism can continue even without racists.**” (Chasin and Franke)

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## Structural Racism Statistics

Structural racism impacts the food system in multiple ways. People of color in Tompkins County may experience economic disadvantage, health inequities, as well as discrimination by employers, law enforcement, government officials, realtors and landlords and other inequities that affect their health and wellbeing and their interactions with the food system.

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*“... the **statistics describe hidden structures** underneath people’s daily lives that keep reproducing unequal outcomes. This is structural racism.”*  
*(Chasin and Franke)*

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The following facts and figures are derived from the US Census, the USDA ERS, and the 2017 report by Chasin and Franke entitled, “Structural Racism in Ithaca City and Tompkins County.”



## Residents by Race

Tompkins County, averaged 2010 - 2019

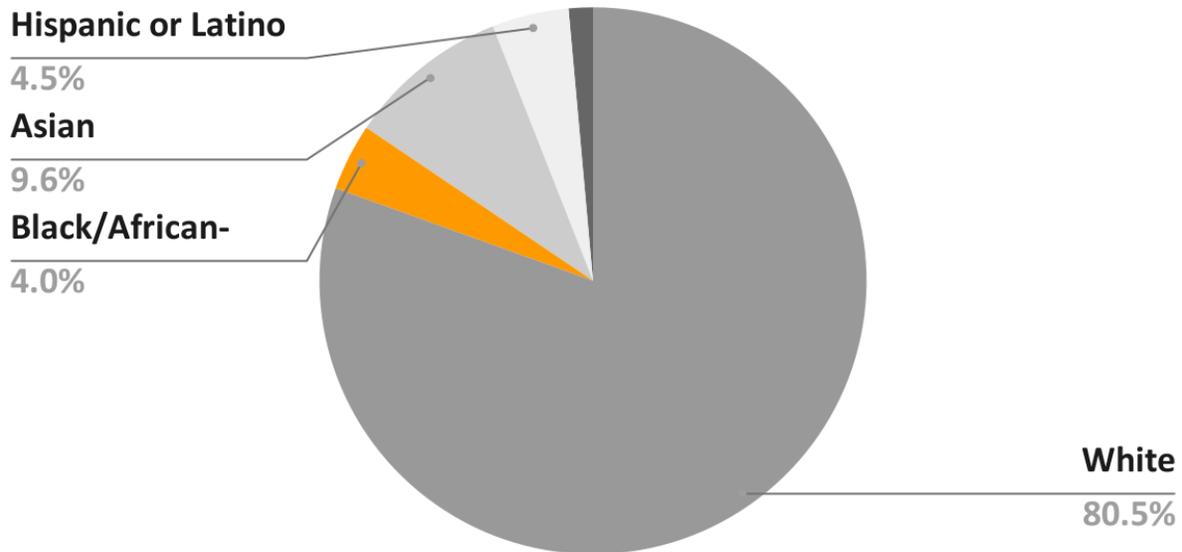


Figure 25: Tompkins residents by race (U.S. Census American Community Survey)  
Smallest pie slice = Other, includes "American Indian," "Some Other Race," or "Two or More Races"

Tompkins County is primarily white (Figure 25). Ithaca, where roughly 50% of the Tompkins County Black population resides, is rated as “moderately segregated.” Black residents are largely concentrated in Ithaca City, primarily Southside, West End and parts of West Hill. However, many Black residents have been dispersed to the outskirts of Ithaca town due to spiking rental costs and hidden or unintentional discrimination by landlords (Chasin and Franke). This has implications for proximity to food sources (there are fewer, and lower quality, food sources the further from Ithaca City you get), and the difficulty of transportation (infrequent and/or inconveniently timed TCAT bus routes). Locals have observed a fragmentation of the Black community. It puts those who have been displaced farther from community resources such as community centers, parks, and Black-owned businesses.

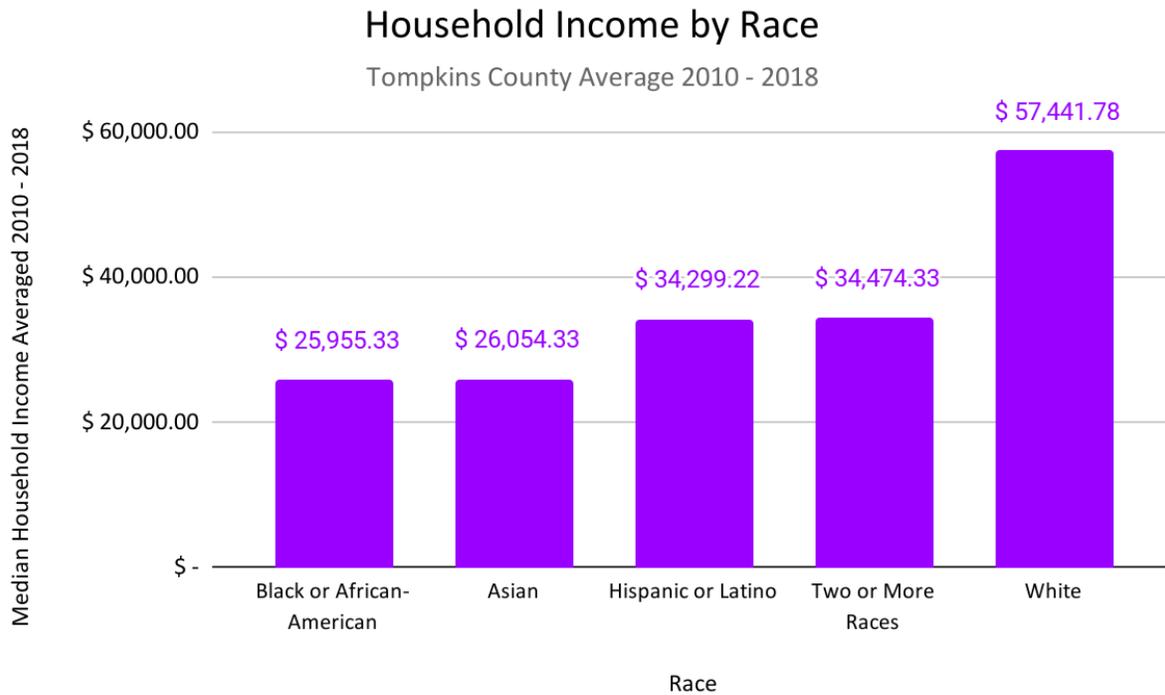


Figure 26: Tompkins household income by race (U.S. Census American Community Survey).

The City of Ithaca in particular has the lowest income in Tompkins County (Figure 26). It is notable that this is also the most diverse segment of Tompkins County, with nearly 50% of Tompkins County’s Black population living there (Chasin and Franke).

Race and socio-economic status are closely linked. This trend can be seen nationally as well, where Black men earn \$0.98 (and Black women \$0.97) for every \$1.00 white individuals make (Gould). In Tompkins County, Black residents experience much higher unemployment rates than white residents (Figure 25), and see lower rates of home ownership (Figure 26).

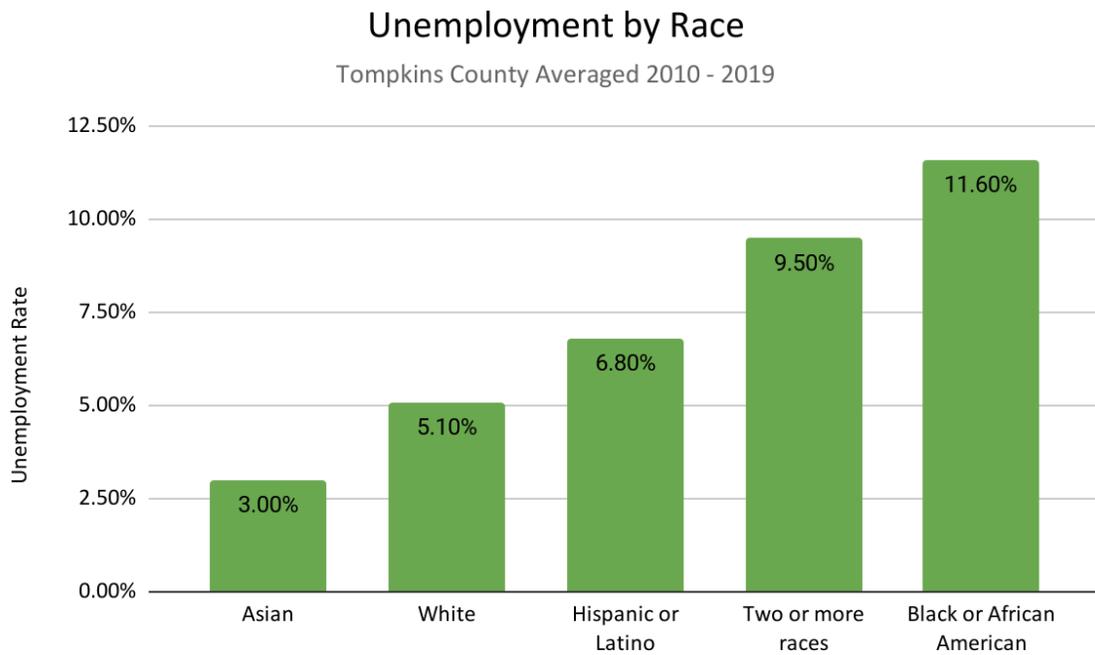


Figure 28: Tompkins unemployment by race (U.S. Census American Community Survey).

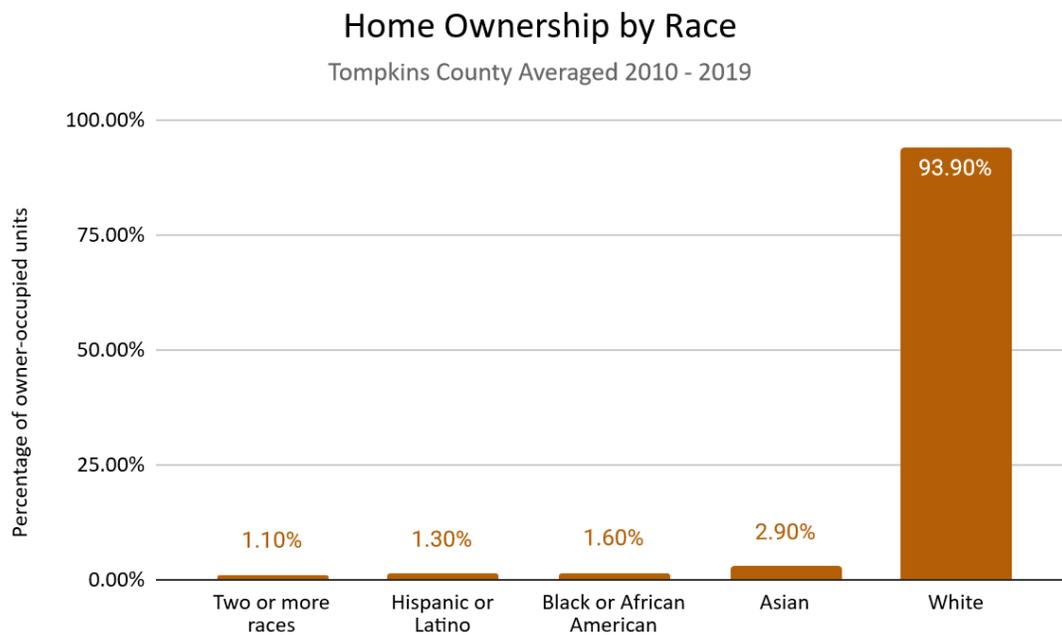


Figure 27: Tompkins home ownership by race (U.S. Census American Community Survey).



Across many social determinants of health, Black residents experience lower income, higher unemployment rates, higher reliance on public transportation and food assistance programs, higher rates of incarceration, and poorer health outcomes than their white counterparts.

According to the Tompkins County Health Department's Community Health Assessment (2013-2017), white residents have significantly better health outcomes than do other groups. In Tompkins County, Black residents have:

- 63% higher percentage of premature deaths (<age 75)
- 48% more years of potential life lost per 100,000
- 29% lower rate of adequate prenatal care
- 178% higher asthma hospitalization rate
- 47% higher diseases of the heart hospitalization rate
- 59% higher congestive heart failure hospitalizations per 10,000
- 96% higher diabetes hospitalizations
- 240% higher drug-related hospitalizations

People with cumulative disadvantage in Tompkins County often don't have enough money to obtain food or consistent transportation to food retailers. Restrictions on time and energy, as a result of low income, are also common. For example, working two full time jobs will leave people exhausted and without time to cook. Unfortunately, people of color- especially African Americans- experience this more than white people of the same economic and social backgrounds.



## Food Justice and Food Sovereignty Efforts in Tompkins

Food justice is a holistic and structural view of the food system that sees healthy food as a human right and addresses structural barriers to that right. The movement draws in part on *environmental justice*, which emerged in the 1980s as a critique of how environmentalism became more mainstream as it became more elite, more white, and more focused on wilderness and scenery than on human communities vulnerable to pollution (the effects of which are at once disparate and racialized) (Purdy).

Food Justice is communities exercising their right to grow, sell, and eat healthy food. Healthy food is fresh, nutritious, affordable, culturally-appropriate, and grown locally with care for the well-being of the land, workers, and animals. The Food Justice Movement is inspired by grassroots and organizing movements before it, including the Civil Rights Movement and Environmental Justice Movement.

Food sovereignty, an idea developed by Via Campesina and brought to the public in 1996, is:

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*“...the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations.”*

*– Declaration of Nyéléni, the first global forum on food sovereignty,  
Mali, 2007*

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Groundswell, Youth Farm, Learning Farm, Traditional Center for Indigenous Knowledge and Healing, Rocky Acres Community Farm, Fort Baptist Farm, Healthy Food For All, and others are all involved in education and advocacy efforts to increase participation in the local food justice movement. BIPOC-led organizations such as the Ultimate Reentry Opportunity (URO), Southside Community Center, Greater Ithaca Activities Center (GIAC), No Mas Lagrimas, Black Hands Universal, and the Learning Farm are all critical community organizers working to advance food justice and sovereignty in Tompkins County.



## Awareness of Support Services

When it comes to food security, the local reality in Tompkins County is characterized by a mix of strengths, as well as many specific and unique challenges. One of the most frequently cited concerns we heard in surveys and focus groups was: How can so many people in our community still be struggling with food security given the abundance of resources, programs, and free / low-cost food?

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*“I think that there is availability of food. It’s just coordinating it better—working with farmers, restaurants— we have the resources, it’s just that we aren’t using [them]. Find a way to get food to people. **We need to work better as a community to make that food available**”*

— Non-profit director in Tompkins County

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With so many resources available, it’s hard to believe that more than 1 in 9 residents are food insecure. The large number of resources can actually be part of the problem because it is hard to keep track of what is available and when, who is eligible, and what you have to do to get the support you need. Not every food distribution or food resource is well publicized, and many emergency food operations have limited hours that may not fit easily into daily or weekly schedules. The Horn Research analysis of underserved populations for FBST identifies **awareness and access based on limited hours** as major barriers for food insecure populations getting the food they need in the Southern Tier (Horn Research). There is more outreach, education, and messaging work required to convince people to get the help they need. As one interviewee put it, “one of the best things you can do for your family is to sign up for SNAP, get your kids signed up for free/reduced lunch, use these services!”

---

*“**To get the food you need, it’s like a full time job.** Where can I get this, where can I get that? It’s almost like we’re punishing people just because they’re hungry. Some kind of policy that would make ppl not have to run from place to place to get the kind of nutrition they need. Or more money and more access to food.”*

— Non-profit director, Tompkins County

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Human Services Coalition runs the 2-1-1 information and referral line to help people find what



they need in the moment, but even if people feel comfortable calling to ask, maintaining an accurate directory of everything available and responding in real time to any programming changes is an enormous undertaking and some information may be out of date. Meanwhile, the long list of resources available in such a directory may decrease the sense of urgency for funders, politicians, or community members who may not have lived experience. Furthermore, it can be challenging to actually access the listed resources if any additional barriers are present.

Language or literacy barriers compound this challenge for many. Being undocumented may present additional challenges and fears when asked to sign in to receive food or seeking a referral for certain pantries.

Coordinating transportation or delivery, making appointments, completing paperwork, and providing documentation to access a food resource are additional hurdles. If you are already hesitant to seek support or have had bad experiences in the past with accessing resources, or if you are juggling many demands and tasks at once and have limited time and bandwidth, these combined challenges can feel insurmountable and can discourage you from even trying.

As it relates to those who experience food insecurity, survey takers were asked, “What are your biggest barriers or challenges when it comes to feeding yourself or your family the food you want to eat?” The most common responses were lack of money, dietary restrictions (for health reasons), and lack of time to cook.



## Barriers to Food Access, by Income

When categorized by income: dietary restrictions due to health, religious/cultural restriction, or personal preference are a more notable barrier for households with lower incomes (Figure 29). These households may have less disposable income to purchase these foods, or the foods may not be readily accessible/available for purchase. For instance, there are barriers which though not frequently mentioned, disproportionately affect lower income households. One of these is **transportation**, which disproportionately affects households with incomes <\$15,000 (Figure 30). Disability/health related mobility may also be related to transportation, and this also seems to affect lower-income households. **Lack of cooking skills and food preparation facilities/appliances** are also barriers that affect lower-income households, with the greatest proportion in the \$15-30K income range (Figure 29).

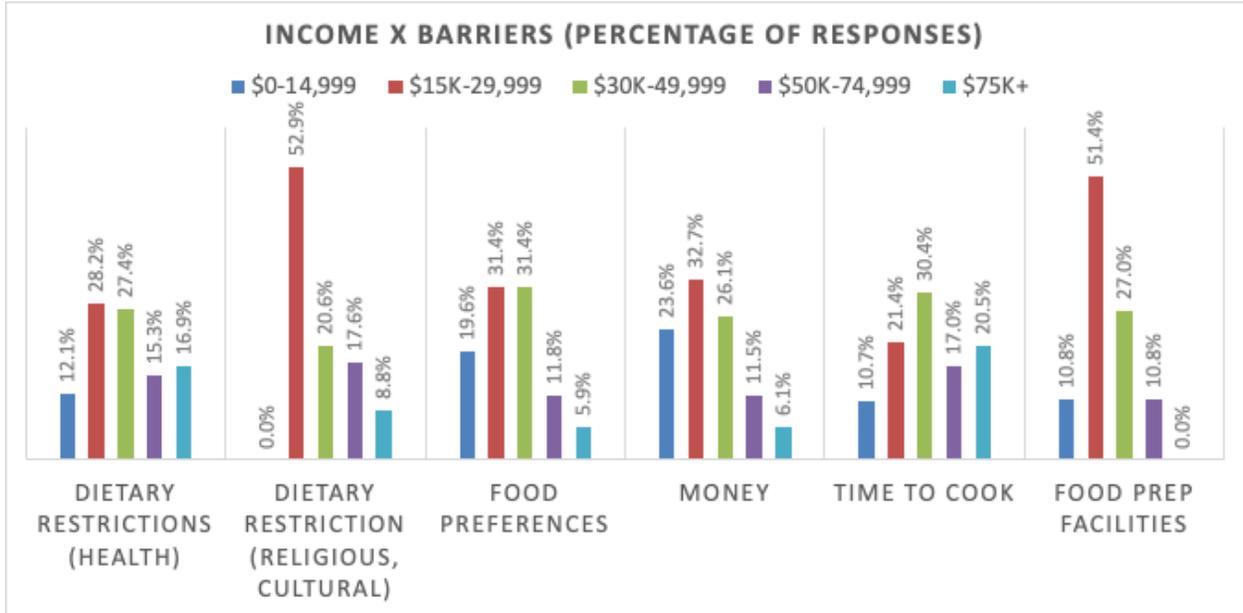


Figure 29: Barriers to food access by income.

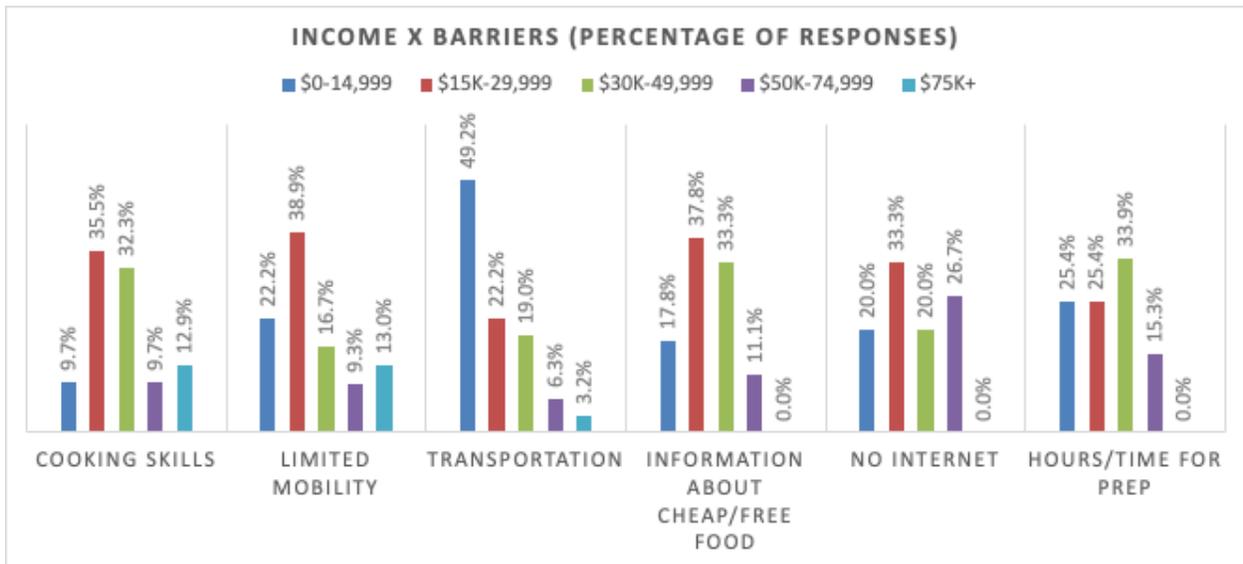


Figure 30: Barriers to food access by income (percentage of responses).



## Evolving Emergency Feeding Programs

Many strengths of the community food assistance and emergency feeding infrastructure in Tompkins County were identified:

- the presence of the Food Bank of the Southern Tier, with a dedicated and consistent staff and plentiful resources for pantries
- FBST Mobile Food Pantry Program Truck that visits under-resourced locations and fills gaps between regular distribution dates at brick-and-mortar pantries
- the presence of the Friendship Donation Network and the rescue food provided by its volunteers
- the presence of many food pantries throughout the County who work well together (COVID has strengthened connections)
- increased collaboration between pantries and local businesses and farmers, who have made more healthy food available to more people
- strong volunteer base, with new people stepping up and doing more especially in the face of COVID
- ongoing (though moderate) funding from Tompkins County government
- local donors interested in food issues

Alongside those strengths, interviewees shared concerns, challenges, and gaps. Chief among them were concerns about vulnerable populations. Providers noted that **families without transportation, people living in rural areas, seniors, and people of color** are often the hardest to reach through the pantry system (see "Vulnerable and Underserved Populations in Tompkins County" for more on vulnerable populations identified). We heard about the importance of working with people on the ground, actively listening to people's needs, and working to find out who is being served (and who is not).

With the majority of services concentrated in downtown Ithaca, many communities are left behind. Many felt that there is more work needed to create a sense of belonging, inclusion, and empowerment, and that the County Legislature should be directly addressing these inequities in the food system. One stakeholder shared:

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*"Do away with the old way of doing business, creating a new normal. How do we undo, having the people who are at the table, at the table? If we're serious, **we need to do things differently.**"*



— Community organizer

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Food pantries and other safety net food programs provide crucial support to people in need of food. Unfortunately, stigma deters people from utilizing these services. Residents and volunteers running pantries expressed 1) their dissatisfaction with the emergency food distribution model 2) a desire to dramatically shift the service model toward “free groceries” or “food centers” and 3) a desire to reduce the need for these services altogether.

They also expressed the need to train pantry volunteers in trauma-informed service and a desire to hire staff as rates of volunteerism decline. Without paid staff and consistent funding, pantries lack the resources to build capacity in many important areas, including grant-writing, data collection and tracking, delivery systems, sourcing and storing fresh and culturally appropriate foods, customer service skill development, and community outreach—all of which could help address unmet needs.

**It’s time to normalize food pantries**--because they are a permanent part of our food system. Similarly, and often due to a previous bad experience, many providers encounter residents grappling with their own pride, and not knowing where to start to ask for help. Additionally, some people feel comfortable using programs like SNAP, but not visiting pantries (and vice versa).

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*“**Stigma and judgment** has hampered the success of pantries. People deserve dignity and respect. Need to normalize use of the pantry.”*

— Rural pantry coordinator

*“People **don’t deserve to experience dehumanizing, shame and stigma** of “handout,” lined up on the street waiting for a bag of food”*

— Non-profit director

*“Us vs. Them, negative, judgmental, instead of solidarity, **we’re all in this together**. Embarrassing for me to utilize a pantry b/c I didn’t know what people were thinking, judgmental stares, wondering what I’m spending her money on.”*

— Food pantry client

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## Reliance on Volunteers to Provide Food Assistance

Like running a grocery store or restaurant, running a food pantry requires hours of labor including packing boxes, helping clients, completing paperwork, and seeking funding support. Unlike grocery stores or restaurants, however, pantries are often run by volunteers, many of whom are overworked and hesitant to ask for more support because they know what a big job it is. As one coordinator said, “you can’t ask people to help until it hurts...that’s how it goes in rural communities a lot of the time.”

During a public health crisis like COVID-19, when the need for food resources has escalated, the number of volunteers and amount of unpaid effort involved in food assistance has also risen significantly. Since March 2020, Mutual Aid volunteers have established a network of over 60 food sharing cabinets stocked and maintained by community members, collected donations and staffed regular tables at community sites with food and household items, and organized an on-call corps of volunteers to pick up and deliver groceries for quarantined neighbors. This is not to mention countless instances of one-to-one support organized through social media.

We can and should honor that work and take pride in a community that rises to the occasion to take care of our neighbors in times of crisis. Still, the number of volunteers donating their time and money just to maintain a system that still does not meet the need shows us that we have a long way to go.

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*“Pantries are crucial and can do so much to support communities. Also, they can do so much more, and could really change lives”*

— *Pantry Staff Member*

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Without paid staff and consistent funding, pantries lack the resources to build capacity in many important areas, including grant-writing, data collection and tracking, delivery systems, sourcing fresh and culturally appropriate foods, customer service skill development, and community outreach - all of which could help address unmet needs.



Pantries could also devote more time to navigating the rules and restrictions around food rescue and clarify Good Samaritan laws so that grocery stores, retailers, and restaurants can feel at ease donating past-date food. The few pantry sites that do have paid staff and infrastructure such as coolers, storage, and vehicles are already proof of what a huge difference this can make. Most agreed that having paid staff and expanded, consistent funding would, “make so much more possible.”

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*“I need support. We have no funders, just community donors.”*

— *Grassroots organizer*

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Meanwhile, even maintaining the status quo when it comes to pantries may be too much to ask in our current system. Many pantry volunteers are elderly and assembling a younger volunteer force to replace them is likely not realistic. The high cost of living and changing cultural norms mean that there are far fewer young or middle-aged adults available for extensive volunteer work alongside their personal and professional commitments.



## Limited Access to Nutritious, Fresh, Culturally Appropriate Foods

Produce is challenging to distribute and keep fresh, so small retailers and many pantries opt for shelf-stable food options. These convenience foods do not fill the nutritional, cultural, or preferential needs of county residents. People with dietary restrictions often need to spend extra time planning their meals, seeking out appropriate foods, and preparing foods from scratch, and sometimes pay higher costs for pre-prepared meals that meet their needs.

Vegetarian, vegan and gluten free options have expanded substantially, however, restaurants are challenging to navigate when seeking food that meets following needs identified by survey responders:

- Low carbohydrate
- Gluten free
- Vegetarian
- Vegan
- Lactose-free/non-dairy
- Religious restrictions
- Medical restrictions (salt, carbohydrate)
- Anti-inflammatory
- Common allergens (dairy, soy, wheat, nuts)
- Less processed
- Corn free

Registered Dietitians are available to support menu and meal planning for those with restrictions, but their services are not covered for all insurance plans and all conditions.

Currently, medically tailored meal programs are available for seniors and those on disability through Foodnet Meals on Wheels and for those under Hospicare or residing in long-term care facilities.

### Access to Perishable Produce through Emergency Food Operations

Nutrition is key to food security and can be overlooked in favor of the immediate need to provide adequate calories. This difficult choice is felt by families and providers alike. In recent years, more fresh food has become available for pantries to distribute through partnerships with home gardens, Ithaca Children's Garden, Friendship Donations Network, Nourish Tompkins (CCE Tompkins), and the Food Bank of the Southern Tier. However, significant gaps



remain to fill the actual need. Nutritious, fresh food is desired by so many, but is often unattainable. Many pantries cannot meet those needs. Free and donated food is often highly processed, high in sugar / fat / salt, etc., expired, culturally inappropriate, or simply doesn't fit with people's food preferences. Most people visiting pantries have little to no choice when it comes to decisions about the food they are feeding themselves and their families.

Food sold at convenience stores, gas stations, fast food outlets, and Dollar Generals also falls short. These are the places many food insecure individuals are regularly buying food from - especially in rural communities, where they are often the only food retailers. Many stakeholders identified the need for more education on nutrition, cooking, and healthy eating to help address these additional barriers to food security.

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*"If my goal was 100% to provide food, I would be totally satisfied. If it's to provide quality food, hope, encouragement, I'm not, because there's more work to be done."*

*"People who need pantry food deserve to have fresh, healthy food, shouldn't have second-rate food system"*

*"If you eat like crap, you feel like crap. It's mere survival."*

— Rural food pantry director

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## Climate-Induced Food Losses

Access to food in Tompkins County depends upon a vast global network of producers who use a wide array of means to safely transport perishable and staple items. Worldwide, these systems are under threat from shifting temperatures, extreme weather, and rising seas. The resulting shortfall in supplies, increased costs for cooling and transportation infrastructure, and more frequent spoilage of perishable items will likely reduce our ability to access preferred foods and increase our grocery bills.

For the majority of this section, we focus on climate-induced food losses and price spikes, as described in the new book, *Our Changing Menu: Climate Change and the Foods we Love and Need*, by Cornell Emeritus Professor Michael P Hoffman, Carrie Koplinka-Loehr, and Danielle Eiseman. These authors consulted thousands of peer-reviewed studies to create a concise guide to our future food system and what they describe should make every municipality act.

Currently, 75% of the world's food comes from just 12 types of plants and 5 different animal species (Hoffman, 45). In order to sustain the latter, 77% of the world's agricultural land is used for animal feed crops and grazing (Hoffman, 40). These feed crops and those intended for us are increasingly under threat from extreme weather and the resulting pests that thrive in a changing climate. "High temperature stress is predicted to result in global yield losses of 45%, 52%, and 25% in corn, spring wheat, and soybean, respectively, late in the century" (Hoffman, 34).

Specialty items, like avocado trees, olive trees, nut trees, stone and orchard fruits require seasonal temperature changes, summer nighttime temperature changes, and protection from extreme heat, drought, flooding and hail. They also take many years to mature so relocating their production requires a great deal of planning, all without the benefit of a profitable crop on newly planted acres. Even readily relocated vegetables and annual crops will still require additional infrastructure and human resources. As current producers combat the changing climate, they will need to invest in new irrigation systems, pest controls, and covers such as frost blankets and high tunnels that dramatically increase the cost of production. This increased cost will be passed on to consumers, making these high-nutrient foods available only to the most privileged shoppers.

Price spikes are anticipated for individual items that have reduced yields. More concerning, though, are systemic interruptions that will increase prices throughout the food system. Higher temperatures will increase the need for air conditioning in food processing and storage facilities for the benefit of the products, employees, and customers. Storm surges, floods,



wildfires, and the loss of coastal roads will make transportation difficult. Especially at risk are ports, airport facilities, roads, rail lines, tunnels, and underground transit systems, with implications for the movement of food, especially perishable food (Hoffman, 43). The resulting shortfall in supplies and spoilage of commodities and perishable items alike will likely make our grocery bills increase.

In the face of this knowledge, there are many things that consumers, farmers, and municipalities can do now. We can all work to reduce climate change by reducing our energy use, switching to renewable energy sources, and reducing food waste. We can financially support farmers that are employing climate-smart growing practices and learn to integrate climate resilient foods into our diet, increasing sales for the crops of the future to encourage their expansion now. In our production section, we explore what farmers will need to do and how we can support their efforts.



# Opportunities

As part of our community interviews, surveys, focus groups and conversations among individuals with lived food insecurity experience as well as the community at-large, we asked community members what they would like to see in the future and how we can improve our current system. Here are some suggestions we heard.

**What is your dream for a better food system for our community?**

- "Getting information out and accessible, hard to find info, especially if you don't know where to begin."
- "Easier access to food, increased SNAP benefits, pantries that can help more with food allergies, produce more easily accessible"
- "Fresh, local healthy food accessible to everyone"
- "Wow! Can we grow food everywhere? Stop planting ornamentals, plant fruit and nut bushes instead. Parks could have fruit for everyone! Clean soil is also essential!"
- "Delivery options have improved because of Covid, more free delivery for rural, disabled and elderly"
- "Everyone receives high quality food and therefore needs less medicine"



## Community Suggestions

When surveyed, Tompkins County residents rated the following as the top ways to ensure everyone has enough nutritious food to eat:

1. Increasing accessibility of fresh fruits and vegetables
2. Increasing accessibility of staple foods (eggs, milk, flour, etc.) at little or no cost
3. Increasing accessibility of free and low-cost food
4. Making it easier to earn a living wage
5. Making it easier to find transportation to places like grocery stores and food pantries

When sorted by income, the five priorities listed above remain clear favorites. However, three additional options emerge as clear **preferences from lower-income responders** to the survey, compared to higher income responders:

- **Finding free and low-cost food** is a higher priority for households with incomes less than 50K than it is for households greater than 50K.
- **Food delivery at little to no cost** is a major priority for low-income households, particularly at the lowest band of income (\$0-15K).
- **Making SNAP participation easier** is a high priority for the lowest income households (\$0-15K).



When given the option to provide written answers to resolving food insecurity/access throughout the Tompkins County community, people suggested:

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*“Live in rural pods”*

*“Direct bus service to market”*

*“Hunting education is very much needed in this community as well. Too many people are forced to forage without the proper knowledge of how to safely and humanely do so.”*

*“Find ways to destigmatize asking for food assistance”*

*“Make it easy to donate food for those in need”*

*“MORE DAYCARES THAT WORK WITH DSS SO KIDS AREN'T ON WAITING LISTS UNTIL THEY MAKE IT TO SCHOOL INSTEAD” [sic]*

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The full summaries of both surveys can be accessed on the Tompkins Food Future website: <https://www.tompkinsfoodfuture.org/food-system-plan>.

The 2020 survey (n-541) was distributed primarily to food insecure residents through distribution at food pantries throughout Tompkins County and can be accessed here: [https://4804223b-36cb-4202-a7a1-7b59e17d9d1b.filesusr.com/ugd/bfff24\\_5082794e91504ed4acc685880bc1e82b.pdf](https://4804223b-36cb-4202-a7a1-7b59e17d9d1b.filesusr.com/ugd/bfff24_5082794e91504ed4acc685880bc1e82b.pdf)

The Community Questionnaire (n-592) was distributed through a wide array of neighborhood, organizational, and institutional networks throughout the county and can be accessed here: [https://4804223b-36cb-4202-a7a1-7b59e17d9d1b.filesusr.com/ugd/bfff24\\_c80790b002fa4e63a63d540c3c3d7a48.pdf](https://4804223b-36cb-4202-a7a1-7b59e17d9d1b.filesusr.com/ugd/bfff24_c80790b002fa4e63a63d540c3c3d7a48.pdf)



## Key Takeaways

Throughout the course of the interview and outreach process, stakeholders and community members shared ideas for improving the Food Access and Security sector. The following preliminary priorities were identified:

**Pay a living wage** throughout Tompkins to help more households afford food as well as housing, childcare, and other necessities and decrease reliance on emergency programs. Address systemic solutions and related Social Determinants of Health (SDoH) (see Appendix E on SDoH).

**Make SNAP participation easier** to increase the food budgets of the 62% of eligible households not currently enrolled. Catholic Charities helps with SNAP enrollment: A campaign to support enrollment and reduce stigma is underway by the Childhood Nutrition Collaborative in collaboration with the Nutrition Outreach Education Program (NOEP) coordinator at Catholic Charities.

**Improve food pantry quality** by increasing financial support to pantries, Support people getting healthy food, which isn't always affordable even with SNAP support or always available in pantries due to current funding levels and infrastructure. Scale up food assistance workforce--no more volunteer only staff.

**Provide free transportation for food access** to support the use of SNAP and WIC benefits. Similar programs support free rides to healthcare appointments. Access to nourishing food would provide preventative care for food insecure residents who currently add \$10–\$20 million to our county's health care costs.

**Provide free/low-cost food delivery for** low-income households to minimize the burden transportation places on food access. Leverage points include financial support for expanded delivery from food pantries and expansion of pilot programs that permit delivery options for SNAP and WIC.

**Expand community outreach** to inform residents about their options and reduce stigma associated with financial food assistance and free grocery programs.

**Improve data and resource management** for food donations, food rescue, and perishable items to optimize distribution of emergency food to those who need and want it.

**Develop our food assistance workforce** to increase quality food and service in emergency food programs and boost referrals to health and human services in Tompkins.



**Modernize the charitable food system** to increase people’s dignity by creating a system that behaves like our first-tier food system, exploring innovations such as free grocery stores that are inclusive and client-driven.

## Conclusion

Food is one of life’s most basic necessities. And yet, many in our community and beyond struggle to have enough healthy food to thrive. Despite a strong and growing movement to build greater food security locally, there is still work ahead.

The food system baseline assessment process revealed common themes that serve as important keys to unlocking meaningful solutions: The data, survey responders, vulnerable residents, and stakeholders tend to agree that:

- A living wage is crucial to eating healthfully
- Food is too expensive
- Preparing healthy food is time consuming
- Transportation is lacking
- Food assistance is not easy enough to access

The vision, commitment, and creativity of the people and groups in Tompkins County working on food provides the inspiration needed to sustain this movement. Creating a more sustainable, equitable, healthy and affordable food system requires us to see beyond the status quo. To envision a future where, as one resident put it, “Everyone has access to affordable, nutritious, culturally appropriate food.” This future is not out of reach as long as we believe that all members of our community deserve access to good food. Equipped with a better understanding of the challenges we contend with today, we can work collectively to bring a better future into fruition.



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# Appendices:

## Appendix A: Consequences of Food Insecurity

Food insecurity exacerbates other challenges and leads to a cumulative impact on the entire community. It initiates a stress response in the body and mind that leads to chronic disease, emotional instability, fatigue, and lower levels of concentration. These physical and emotional changes impact job performance, family and community interactions, daily decision-making and self-care. Figure X demonstrates this dynamic.

### A Conceptual Framework: Cycle of Food Insecurity & Chronic Disease



Adapted: Seligman HK, Schilling D. N Engl J Med. 2010;363:6-9.

## Chronic Stress

Chronic stress response can occur when a person experiences strong, frequent, and/or prolonged adversity—such as physical or emotional abuse, chronic neglect, caregiver substance abuse or mental illness, exposure to violence, and/or the accumulated burdens of family economic hardship—without adequate adult support. This kind of prolonged activation of the stress response systems can disrupt the development of brain architecture and other organ systems and increase the risk for stress-related disease and cognitive impairment, well into the adult years.



## Education / Grades and Job Performance

The annual United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) report on national food security reveals that the burden of food insecurity **falls most heavily on families with children**; families with younger children are especially vulnerable. The USDA reported that 20.6% of US households with children ages 0-18 years, and 14.9% of all US households, experienced food insecurity in 2011 (ERS, Household Food Security).

Food insecurity can damage children's health and brain development years before they enter a classroom. By kindergarten, food-insecure children often are cognitively, emotionally and physically behind their food-secure peers (Children's Health Watch). Caretakers are also negatively affected. Food insecure children have a higher incidence of sick days, which are linked to parent absences from work, which are often unpaid. Child hunger leads to greater absenteeism, presenteeism and turnover in the work environment, all of which are costly for families and employers.

Similarly, as adults, those who experienced hunger as children create a workforce pool that is less competitive, with lower levels of educational and technical skills, and constrained human capital (Cook and Jeng). Nationwide, food insecurity is estimated to lead to **\$5.48 billion in lost productivity every year** (*\$160 Billion: The Cost of Hunger in America*).

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*"The healthy development of all children benefits all of society by providing a solid foundation for economic productivity, responsible citizenship, and strong communities."*

*- Jack P. Shonkoff, MD, Director, Center on the Developing Child Harvard University*

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These effects on educational and job performance impact a person's lifelong earning capacity and contribution to society, as well as their children's future earning capacity. This is described as a "cycle of poverty," in which one generation's poverty creates long-term barriers for the next generation's achievement of its potential (Karp, 1993).



## Health and Health Care Costs

Food insecurity poses risks to overall health and drives up health care costs in several ways: low access to nutritious food increases risk for chronic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension; stress associated with managing food insecurity poses mental health risks and makes it harder to manage overall health; and food insecure individuals are more likely to delay medication refills or clinic visits, which perpetuates a cycle of poor health outcomes (“[The Healthcare Costs of Food Insecurity](#)”). Adults in households with very low food security were 15.3 percentage points more likely to have a chronic illness than adults in households with high food security (Gregory and Coleman-Jensen). The number of non-communicable disease conditions for adults in households with low food security is, on average, 18 percent higher than for those in high food-secure households (Christian, ERS). A 2017 report from the USDA found that **food insecurity is associated with 10 of the costliest and most deadly non-communicable diseases in the country**, including hypertension, diabetes, cancer, and stroke (Christian, ERS). Another study suggests that food insecure patients are at doubled risk of developing diabetes (Tait et al).

The burden of chronic illness is primarily born by families. Hungry children have greater odds of being hospitalized, and the average pediatric hospitalization costs approximately \$12,000 (Cook and Jeng). Food insecure adults have annual **health care expenditures that are \$1,834 higher than food secure adults**. When distributed, food insecurity is estimated to cost each household in Tompkins an additional \$150-200 per year, with a **total health care cost burden to Tompkins County of \$10-20 million** and a nationwide impact of \$51.8 billion in excess health care expenditures in 2016 (Berkowitz et al).

## Appendix B: Food Security Nationally

Certain groups are more impacted by food insecurity nationally compared to others. Of particular concern is the increase in food security affecting the elderly, communities of color, and households with children (Bauer). Significant racial disparities in food insecurity existed before COVID-19 and remain in the wake of the pandemic. Feeding America projects that 21% of Black individuals (1 in 5) may experience food insecurity in 2021, compared to 11% of White individuals (1 in 9) (*The Impact of the Coronavirus on Food Insecurity in 2020 & 2021*). Food insecurity is experienced in greater proportion by non-White racial and ethnic groups due to a number of factors – a key one being structural racism and discrimination which leads to



intergenerational poverty and a wealth gap. These disparities are also apparent in the underlying factors that contribute to food insecurity (Odoms-Young).

Household food insecurity for mothers with young children surpassed 40 percent in April 2020, so that “almost one in five households of mothers with children age 12 and under, the children were experiencing food insecurity.” (Bauer).

## Appendix C: Federal, State and Local Food Assistance Programs

### Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

This is achieved by providing funds to low income households to purchase food at grocery stores, convenience stores, and farmers’ markets. SNAP dollars are limited to purchases of groceries, seeds, and edible plants and do not cover prepared meals, pet food, or other household necessities. SNAP benefits are pre-loaded onto an EBT card that works like a debit card and benefits are accepted at over 75 food retailers in Tompkins County, maintaining significant power of choice for SNAP participants about what food to buy and where to shop. Eligibility is determined by federal guidelines on income, household size, age, and disability status. SNAP enrollment makes households eligible for additional programs, such as WIC for mothers and children five and under, National School Lunch Program free lunch for any school age children in the household, farmers market coupons and subsidized local farm shares through the Healthy Food For All program. These are discussed in more detail below.

Unfortunately, New York does not release county-level SNAP eligibility data. However, we can use Census income data to estimate a percentage of Tompkins County’s population that is likely eligible for SNAP, given that one eligibility requirement is low income.

In 2020 and 2021, SNAP policies increased benefit amounts to respond to higher food insecurity caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, in 2020, there was actually a 2.93% decrease in use of SNAP in Tompkins County, from 7,381 in 2019 to 7,165 in 2020 (Ref).

Although the people who were enrolled received greater benefit from the program, the program’s reach decreased during this period of intense hardship for many households. (*Selected Characteristics of People at Specified Levels of Poverty in the Past 12 Months*)

### Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)



Foods provided through the WIC Program are designed to supplement participants' diets with specific nutrients. WIC authorized foods include infant cereal, baby foods, iron-fortified adult cereal, fruits and vegetables, vitamin C-rich fruit or vegetable juice, eggs, milk, cheese, yogurt, soy-based beverages, tofu, peanut butter, dried and canned beans/peas, canned fish, whole wheat bread and other whole-grain options. For infants of women who do not fully breastfeed, WIC provides iron-fortified infant formula. Special infant formulas and medical foods may also be provided if medically indicated.

NYS WIC program provides nutritious foods to approximately 368,215 women, infants and children each month through 89 local agencies throughout NY state. WIC services are provided at a variety of clinics. Locations include but are not limited to, county health departments, hospitals, schools and other community-based organizations. In 2018, the NYS WIC program implemented an electronic system (EBT) called "eWIC". This electronic benefits system replaced the paper vouchers with a "debit" like card for the purchase WIC food benefits.

The WIC program supports the local economy through the purchase of food. There are currently 9 participant WIC stores in Tompkins County, they include: Tops, Walmart, Wegmans, Shur-Save (Trumansburg), P&C Fresh, Dryden Food Market, Byrne Dairy, and Lansing Market. WIC also supports local farmers through the Farmers Market Nutrition Program. Eligible WIC participants receive coupons in addition to their benefits to purchase locally grown fruits and vegetables at farmers' markets or road side stands.

The WIC program offers Breastfeeding Counseling and Support services. WIC Clinics are breastfeeding friendly and staffed with trained breastfeeding counselors. WIC provides education to help breastfeeding mothers return to work by creating a plan and helping the mother create a plan. Breast pumps are available based on need. WIC encourages exclusive breastfeeding by offering a food package with more nutritious food for breastfeeding moms 6 months or longer.

Tompkins County has a Peer Counseling program which offers mom to mom breastfeeding support from peer counselors, as well as weekly virtual support groups for WIC moms.

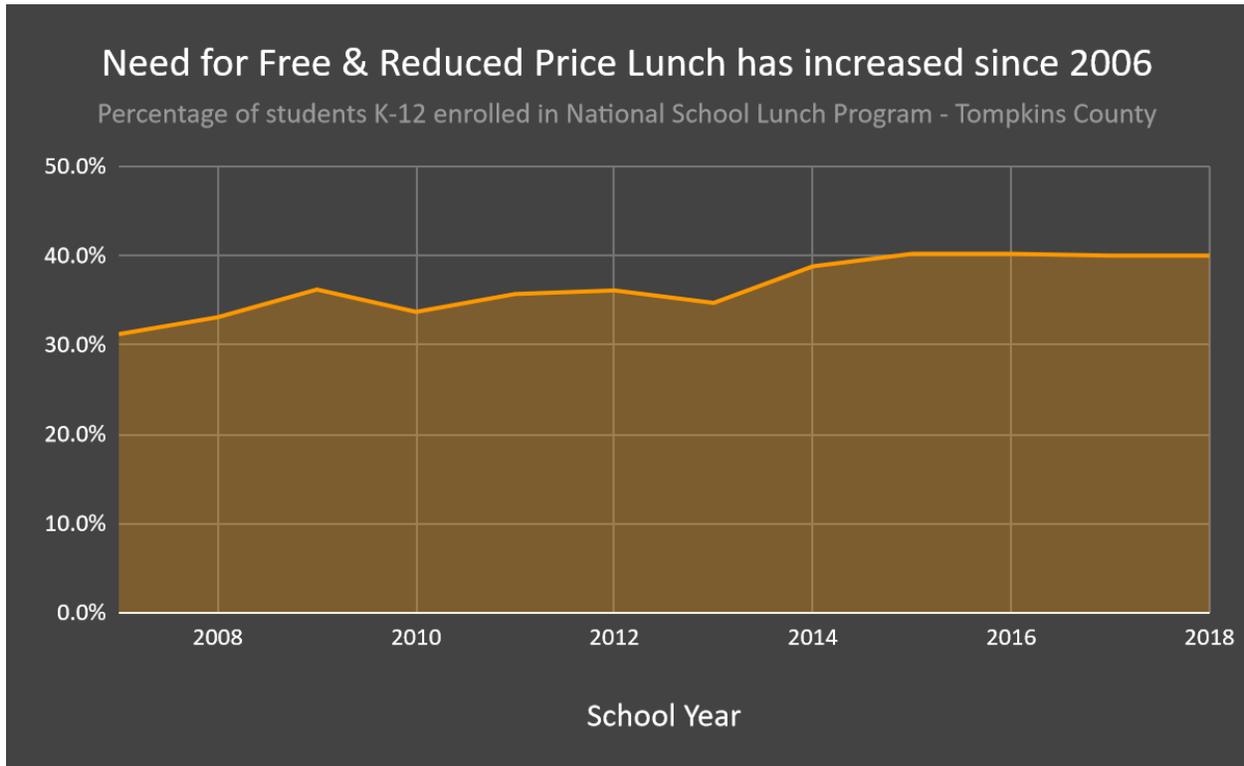
#### Need for Free & Reduced Price Lunch

Research shows that price breakfast and lunch program through the NSLP help alleviate poverty and food insecurity, boost academic success, enhance well-being, and lead to better health outcomes for participating students, especially those most vulnerable. To learn more, visit: [https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/School-Meals-are-Essential-Health-and-Learning\\_FNL.pdf](https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/School-Meals-are-Essential-Health-and-Learning_FNL.pdf)





In Tompkins County, the need for Free & Reduced Price Lunch has increased since 2006:



### State and Local Assistance Programs

At the Ithaca Farmers Market (IFM) and Trumansburg Farmers Market, SNAP-enrolled residents can utilize [Fresh Connect](#) checks, which are administered by the NY Department of Agriculture and Markets and provide \$2 for every \$5 spent using Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT). The [Farmers Market Nutrition Program](#) (FMNP) is also offered through multiple farmers markets every summer, though benefits are limited to \$20 per person per year and are only available to seniors, WIC households, and veterans. One advantage of the FMNP program is that residents can enjoy its benefits at multiple markets and farm stands in the area, since these businesses are not required to be registered as SNAP retailers in order to offer the FMNP service. Eligible businesses are listed on the [Tompkins County CCE website](#).

[Healthy Food For All](#) offers Community Supported Agriculture shares at half price or less for SNAP or WIC eligible households. They allow members to self-identify and provide anonymous participation so that members can participate in their farm shares without stigma



or shame. They have also worked to keep bureaucratic hurdles to a minimum. HFFA raises community funds to cover the full cost of the farm shares so that farmers still receive a market price for their high quality food. This is an expensive program to run and HFFA needs to raise over \$100,000 each year to cover subsidy costs for 250 members, and additional funding for staff hours.

The Youth Farm raises funds to cover the cost of farming and distribution, enabling them to “sell” their produce on a sliding scale through their mobile farm stand, which typically operates at three locations each week during the summer and fall. Their model provides education as well as food access, but has the high cost of operating a diversified farm.

Food as Medicine Tompkins provides free seasonal farm food (market vouchers or CSA shares) for 50-75 food insecure individuals diagnosed with a diet-related illness. All participants are referred from a participating healthcare provider such as Cayuga Center for Healthy Living, Dr Coch and Dr Law’s offices of endocrinology, or Ithaca Free Clinic. This program was started by CCE Tompkins with Healthy Food For All and has since grown to merge with Rural Health Network of South Central New York. Funding is 100% grant provided, but conversations are underway to obtain subsidies from healthcare insurers.

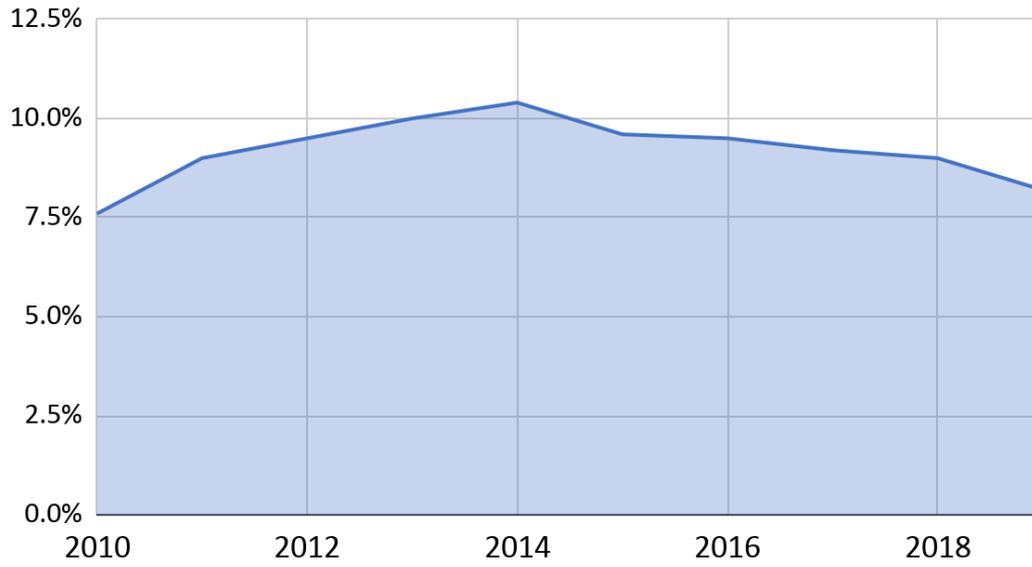
## Appendix D: SNAP Trends and Demographics

SNAP trends over the past ten years in Tompkins County



### Percentage of total households receiving SNAP

Tompkins County 2010 - 2019

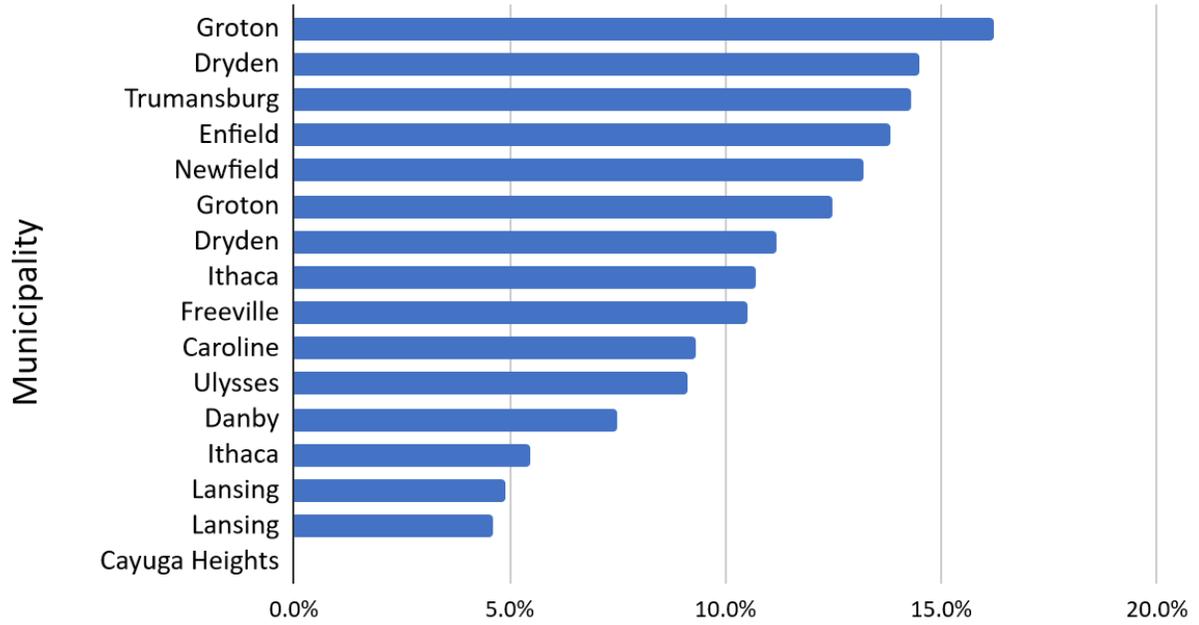


### Percent of Population Receiving SNAP



# Percent of population receiving SNAP

By Municipality - Tompkins County 2010 - 2019



Average percentage of households receiving SNAP 2010 - 2019



Rates of Food insecurity, SNAP participation and poverty

### Rates of Food Insecurity, SNAP participation, and Poverty

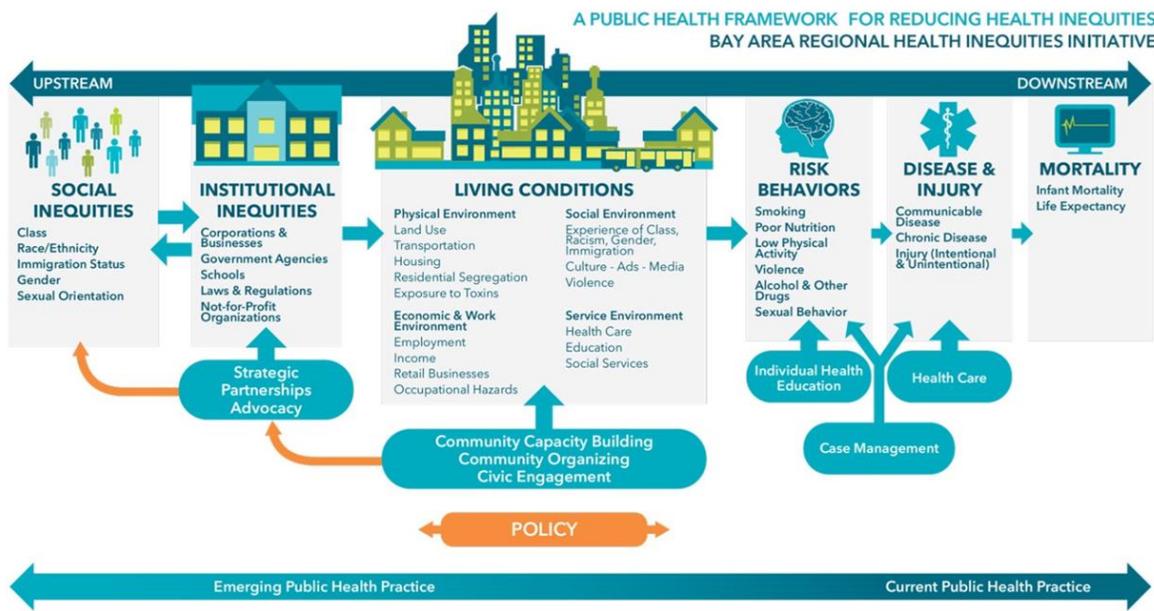
Tompkins County 2018





# Appendix E: Social Determinants of Health:

A key framework for enacting widespread change is the Social Determinants of Health (SDoH). This is the future of public health. Instead of focusing on individual behavior, which doesn't have a great impact on the community, we should focus on things like policy, living conditions, wage, and institutional inequities. These are the types of needs identified by stakeholders. For more info, see the [interactive graphic from Cornell Cooperative Extension](#).





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