

# CONSUMPTION

## Project Summary

Tompkins Food Future is a community food system planning initiative aimed at creating the first-ever comprehensive food system plan for Tompkins County. The goal is to create a more sustainable, equitable, affordable and healthy food system for all members of our community. What follows is a summary of what's been learned about the state of our local food system through community conversations, in-depth interviews, focus groups, surveys, neighborhood canvassing, and data collection. This section covers **Food Consumption**.

## Introduction

Food is one of the essential components to human life. Being well nourished enables us to sleep well, exercise, perform well at school or work, and live a full and connected life. Through shared meals, cultural dishes, and celebrations, food also nourishes our family and community connections. For many, food choices reflect our values about how we want producers, processors, retailers, and other food system workers to live and thrive; our values about how animals should or should not be domesticated for our consumption; our connection to the land; and our desire for cleaner air, water, and soil.

In this section, we explore community dietary patterns, cultural preferences about food, and how nutrition science and dietetics relates to other values around food choices such as environmental and community impact.

## Challenges

**Fruits and Vegetables:** Nine out of 10 Americans do not eat enough fruits and vegetables. Tompkins County residents are no exception, although we may be doing better than average. The USDA recommends five servings of fruits and vegetables every day. Only 32% of our community survey respondents claimed to eat that many and 24% admitted to eating two or fewer servings per day. Tompkins has many of the indicators the CDC uses to measure availability of fruits and vegetables (farmers markets, farm to school programs, salad bars in schools, and the existence of a Food Policy Council), but many of these resources are used by a small minority of consumers.

**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. The options throughout the food environment are similarly limited by infrastructure and business decisions. Ten percent% of survey respondents said that the food they wanted to eat was not available. When produce is

*To access the full content of the Consumption baseline - a living document with room for ongoing community input and updates - please visit [www.tompkinsfoodfuture.org/food-system-plan](http://www.tompkinsfoodfuture.org/food-system-plan)*

# TOMPKINS COUNTY FOOD CONSUMPTION AT-A-GLANCE

Dietary patterns, food culture, and availability affect what we eat and that impacts our community health, economy, and the environment

**53%**

SAY HEALTHY, AFFORDABLE FOOD IS A KEY ISSUE\*

**87%**

SAY "GOOD FOOD" MEANS NUTRITIOUS AND ENJOYABLE TO EAT\*

**24%**

SAY THEY EAT 2 OR FEWER DAILY SERVINGS OF FRUIT OR VEG\*

**24%**

OF ADULTS ARE OBESE

**12%**

OF CHILDREN ARE OBESE

**1/10**

OF U.S. ADULTS EAT THE RECOMMENDED 5 FRUITS OR VEG PER DAY



Increasing access to healthy food was the highest priority identified by Tompkins community members.

**\$8,556**

TOTAL SPENT ON FOOD BY THE AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD

**\$4,972**

SPENT ON FOOD EATEN AT HOME

**\$3,593**

SPENT ON FOOD EATEN OUT

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\*BASED ON TOMPKINS COMMUNITY SURVEY RESPONSES

available to consumers, many lack the familiarity, skills, time, or equipment needed to prepare, cook, and eat these foods.

**Eating Out:** Almost half of our meals are prepared by others. Added salt, sugar, and fat in restaurant and other prepared foods is difficult to identify and manage when ordering from a menu or picking up a quick meal. Even consumers who read labels to learn the nutritional content of prepared meals sometimes compromise in the moment to make quick choices from available options.

**Chronic Illness:** Across New York State, more than 10% of the population has been diagnosed with diabetes—double the rate just two decades ago—and another 4.5 million New Yorkers have prediabetes. Within the County, the rate of hospitalization for diabetes-related complications has doubled in the six years spanning 2008–14. Young people are also at increased risk. Heart disease, meanwhile, is now the second-highest cause of death in Tompkins County, with 138 deaths per 100,000. In its 2013–17 Community Health Assessment, the Tompkins County Health Department estimated that 55.1% of adults and 26.6% of school-age youths in the county were overweight or obese. These statistics suggest that more than half of adults and more than one-quarter of school-age youth in Tompkins County are at risk for progression to diabetes and/or cardiovascular disease.

## Opportunities

**A State or County Policy on Food Service** does not exist in New York or in Tompkins, although 10 other states have adopted them. Modeling a county-wide guideline would lead the way for other New York counties to follow, putting pressure on the state. These policies require the development of nutritional guidelines that apply to foods and beverages served or sold to adult populations in government-owned or -controlled facilities, including conferences and on- site or off-site events.

**Farmers markets** that accept SNAP, WIC, and nutrition incentive coupons vastly increase fruit and vegetable consumption. Tompkins has five or more markets each year. Cornell Cooperative Extension has helped smaller markets accept SNAP and promoted other nutrition incentive programs throughout the community. Financial support for these educational materials and SNAP services is needed every year.

**Subsidized CSA shares** from local farms increase fruit and vegetable consumption. For 15 years, Healthy Food For All has provided a growing number of farm shares at reduced to no cost for families with limited incomes. The burden of raising an increasing amount every year (currently over \$200,000) falls on a single staff member at Cornell Cooperative Extension. The program needs a sustainable funding source. Municipalities in other states have taken on this role, using taxpayer funding to subsidize locally grown food for low-income families.

**Farm to School programs** increase fruits and vegetables availability and teach healthy eating behaviors through nutrition-based curriculum and hands-on learning experiences such as farm visits, school gardens, and healthy cooking lessons. Supporting our local program and encouraging participation through school boards would complement and expand the work already underway. Introducing a salad bar into a school lunchroom may also increase the amount and variety of fruits and vegetables consumed by students. Many schools have one in place, but others could be funded by local municipalities.