

Governor's Anti-Hunger Task Force

Final Report



Commonwealth of
Massachusetts



April, 2026

Executive Office of Health and Human
Services (EOHHS)

Massachusetts Department of Agricultural
Resources (MDAR)

Executive Office of Education (EOE)



Letter from the Co-Chairs

Dear Governor Maura Healey and Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll,

In Massachusetts, we take care of each other - in times of crisis and times of plenty. We meet immediate needs and we build systems designed for long-term resilience and sustainability. We recognize that helping people meet their most basic needs is not only the right thing to do, it also benefits us all and forges a stronger Commonwealth.

This was evident when faced with the sudden and unprecedented suspension of the federal SNAP program in November 2025. Governor Healey expedited funding to food banks. Residents and businesses contributed millions of dollars to a statewide effort to support local organizations serving neighbors in need. Farmers offered fresh produce to members of their communities who were struggling. The entire Commonwealth stepped up to proclaim through words and deeds that nobody in Massachusetts should go hungry.

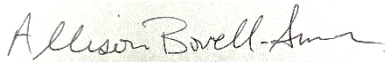
Prior to that crisis, Governor Healey had already taken action, anticipating the impacts of the largest federal cut to the SNAP program in history, by establishing the Anti-Hunger Task Force that has led to this report. Administration officials have coordinated and facilitated the process, but hundreds of residents and dozens of stakeholder organizations contributed their time and ideas to shape these recommendations. From regional gatherings to intense collaborative working sessions, together we have crafted an agenda to help those in Massachusetts facing food insecurity.

Food access is a thread that winds through nearly every aspect of our communities, our private lives, and the issues that shape Massachusetts. We know that food insecurity leads to poor health and adds stress to the public health system. We know that inadequate nutrition has health impacts across all age groups - children without adequate nutrition have poorer outcomes in school, adults who go to work hungry are less effective at their jobs, and older adults, individuals with disabilities, and those with chronic health conditions suffer greatly when a balanced diet is unavailable to them. As a society, we prioritize food access because it is one of the most effective ways of reducing poverty, a crucial element toward improving public health, a key driver of growing our economy, and an essential part of respecting our common humanity.

This is not a new issue, and the recommendations herein benefit from being built upon a strong foundation of the Commonwealth's wise policy and significant investments in food security over the years. The state contributes tens of millions of dollars each year to the emergency food system, guarantees free school meals to all children in public schools, and operates multiple nutrition programs to serve people of all ages with low incomes. We support farmers and fishers and food manufacturers through capital investments, market assistance, and supportive policy, and we have launched innovative programs that connect food insecure families with fresh, healthy, local foods. Again and again, Massachusetts has been a national leader in thoughtful and effective approaches to reducing hunger.

Massachusetts will continue to lead on this issue, but we also believe that the federal government must take steps to restore food security benefits to our residents. In the absence of federal action, consideration of these recommendations will continue that history in the face of new external economic and political forces. We will demonstrate the Commonwealth's commitment to reducing hunger and fostering a more equitable and just food system despite federal actions that seek to erode the very foundation of our work. Systemic solutions require a combination of emergency response and structural changes and must engage every element of the food system. From the farmers and fishers who grow our food, to the non-profit staff and volunteers who feed our communities, to the health care professionals and educators who teach us about nutrition, to the thousands of retailers, distributors, processors, marketers, and other businesses that help ensure that food is safe, available, and accessible, everyone has a role to play. Because in Massachusetts, we take care of each other.

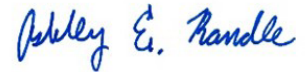
Respectfully,



Allison Bovell-Ammon
Health and Human Services
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Executive Summary

In response to unprecedented federal cuts to food assistance programs and rising food insecurity across the Commonwealth, Governor Maura Healey established the Anti-Hunger Task Force on July 17, 2025, via Executive Order #643 to develop immediate and long-term solutions that ensure all Massachusetts residents have access to nutritious food. The Task Force was convened as a public-private partnership, bringing together state officials, non-profit leaders, community representatives, local farmers, business leaders, and individuals with lived experience of food insecurity to craft recommendations grounded in community voice and data-driven analysis.

Massachusetts has long prioritized food security, yet recent federal actions – including the implementation of the *One, Big, Beautiful Bill Act of 2025*, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) eligibility changes, and the suspension of benefits during a federal shutdown period – have placed new stress on households, food banks, farms, and local economies. Nearly 1 million Massachusetts residents – including children, older adults, people with disabilities, and veterans – rely on SNAP to afford food. Statewide listening sessions and stakeholder engagement conducted by the Task Force throughout 2025 revealed deeper inequities and emerging barriers to food access, especially in rural and socioeconomically distressed areas.

The Task Force's work focused on identifying sustainable, cross-sector strategies to counteract the immediate impacts of federal policy changes while strengthening the Commonwealth's food system. The Task Force's approach prioritized equity, community engagement, and evidence-based policy design to ensure recommendations address both urgent needs and structural challenges.

Key Findings

- Massachusetts has been a national leader in responding to food insecurity through increasing access to nutrition assistance programs, investing in food access infrastructure, and connecting local foods to communities, strategies which provide a strong foundation for the Commonwealth's response to harmful federal cuts.
- SNAP is the largest and most effective anti-hunger program in Massachusetts.
- Federal SNAP cuts and administrative rule changes are projected to reduce food assistance for tens of thousands of households, increasing food insecurity and economic strain, and having negative impacts throughout the Commonwealth's economy.
- Food insecurity is affecting a growing share of Massachusetts households, with reported rates rising significantly in recent years.
- Local food banks, farmers, and retailers are experiencing heightened demand amid constrained resources, underscoring the need for coordinated state support.
- Any solutions should prioritize improving access to SNAP, removing administrative barriers, expanding wraparound support, and building resilience in food supply and distribution systems.





Strategic Priorities

The Task Force's recommendations — informed by statewide listening sessions, expert testimony, and cross-sector collaboration — focus on four strategic priorities:

1. Mitigating Federal Impacts:

Strengthen safety net participation and stability by minimizing disruptions from federal SNAP policy changes, improving communication and administrative processes, and exploring state policy levers to sustain and improve access.

2. Enhancing Food Access and Equity:

Expand community food infrastructure, promote equitable access to nutritious food in underserved areas, and support culturally relevant food resources. This includes bolstering school meals, senior meals, and nutrition programs that reach vulnerable populations.

3. Supporting Local Food Systems:

Leverage partnerships with local farmers, producers, and food hubs to strengthen regional supply chains that increase access to fresh, affordable food while sustaining economic vibrancy in agricultural and food sectors.

4. Coordinating Cross-Sector Collaboration:

Advance integrated responses across government agencies, non-profit networks, healthcare, education, and community organizations. Enhance data sharing, performance measurement, and long-term planning to improve outcomes and reduce duplication of effort.

Outcomes and Next Steps

The Task Force's recommendations call for policy reforms, investment priorities, and collaborative frameworks that center on the lived experiences of those facing food insecurity. Implementation efforts will require ongoing leadership from state agencies, the Legislature, philanthropy, and community partners to ensure that Massachusetts continues to build resilience, protect vulnerable residents, and move toward the goal of eliminating hunger in the Commonwealth. Continued tracking of food insecurity indicators and program participation data will inform adaptive strategies.

Governor Healey's Anti-Hunger Task Force report affirms the Commonwealth's commitment to safeguarding food security as both a moral imperative and a cornerstone of public health, economic stability, and equitable opportunity for all residents.

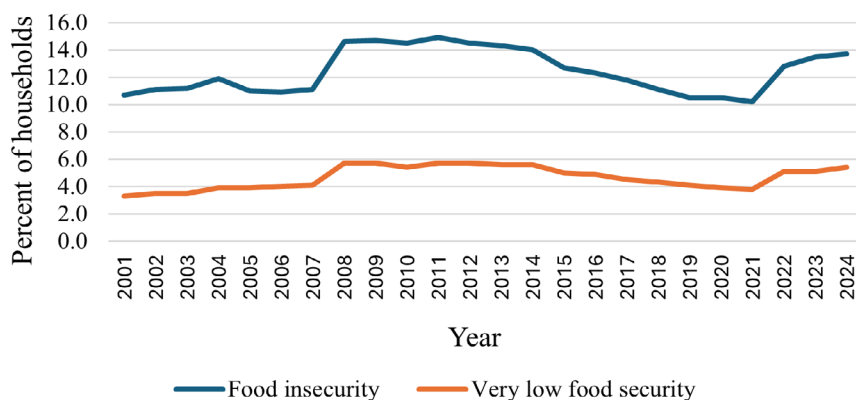
Background

Food Insecurity in Massachusetts

Food insecurity is defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) as when a household's ability to acquire adequate food is limited by a lack of money and other resources. The threshold of "very low" food security is considered to be when the food intake of some household members was reduced, and normal eating patterns were disrupted at times during the year because of limited resources. The USDA's *Household food security in the United States in 2024*¹ report found that nationally the rate of food insecurity had not significantly changed from 2022 to 2024, which the USDA notes coincided with food price inflation that surged starting in 2022, at 13.7% of households. These rates are higher than those during the COVID-19 pandemic (i.e., 2020, 2021). The rate of very low food security was also unchanged nationally from 2022 to 2024, but is statistically significantly higher than during the pandemic, at 5.4% of households.

In Massachusetts, the prevalence of food insecurity and very low food security from 2022 to 2024 was 11.7% and 3.9%, respectively.

Trends in the prevalence of food insecurity in U.S. households, 2001–2024



That is over 332,000 households facing food insecurity. While this rate of food insecurity is statistically significantly lower than the national average, it was a significant increase for the state from 2019 to 2021. Massachusetts was one of only two states in the country that experienced statistically significant increases in food insecurity across the last decade (i.e., 2012-2014 vs. 2022-2024). Massachusetts had the second lowest rate of food insecurity in the country from 2012 to 2014, while sixteen states currently have lower rates.

Data: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey Food Security Supplements.

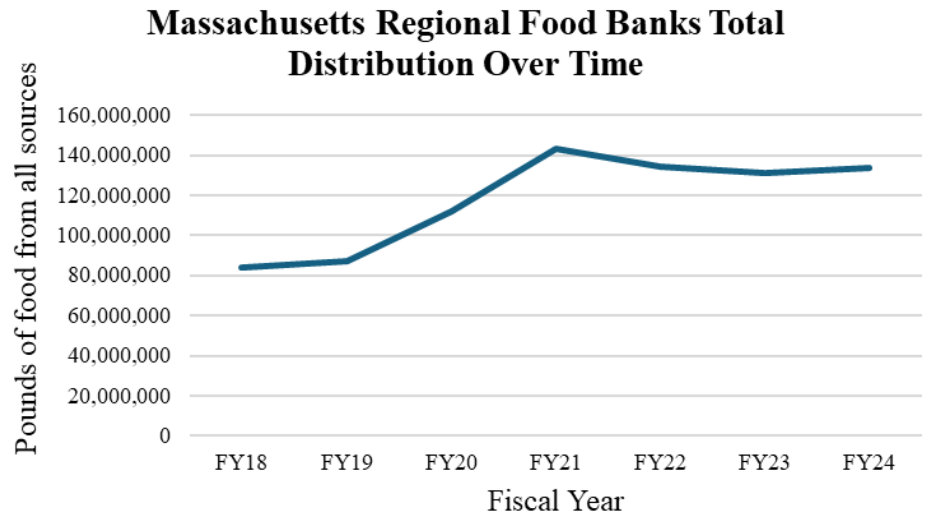
As noted above, food prices have continued to rise faster than overall inflation since the COVID-19 pandemic². There was a historic overall food price increase of 9.9% in 2022, when expenses of food at home (e.g., food bought at grocery stores) increased by 11.4%. This was followed by a 5.9% increase in 2023. Since then, food price increases have slowed to 2.3% in 2024 and 3.0% in 2025. In 2026, this growth is expected to continue to be slower at a predicted rate of 2.7%. The USDA has attributed the price increases to a variety of factors, including an avian influenza (HPAI) outbreak that affected egg and poultry prices, the Russia-Ukraine war, and supply chain issues.

¹ Rabbitt, M.P., Reed-Jones, M., Hales, L.J., Suttles, S., & Burke, M.P. (2025). Household food security in the United States in 2024 (Report No. ERR-358). U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service.

² Food Price Outlook, 2025 and 2026. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. Accessed December 31, 2025: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-price-outlook/summary-findings>.

Related to the increases in food prices and several economic factors over the past few years, the demand on the state's emergency food system, which was designed to respond to short-term, immediate needs of residents unable to afford food, continued to increase. Massachusetts has four food banks: the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts, the Greater Boston Food Bank, the Merrimack Valley Food Bank, and the Worcester County Food Bank. Together, these food banks provide food to residents through over 900 emergency food providers (e.g., food pantries, soup kitchens). The emergency food providers have experienced more than double the need for food over the last five years³. Recently, the state has increased funding for the Massachusetts Emergency Food Assistance Program (MEFAP) which, alongside private donations, has enabled the food banks to sustain this historic level of elevated purchasing.

Food insecurity by definition is largely an economic condition, which is strongly associated with income⁴. Over 30% of U.S. households in 2024 with income less than 185% of the federal poverty line were food insecure, compared to 7.9% of higher income households. In addition to households living in poverty, households with children, single parent households, Black and Hispanic households, women living alone, and households in cities and rural areas, are more likely to be food insecure.



Addressing overall rates of food insecurity requires intentional policy and resource investments that reduce poverty, and Massachusetts has a history of collaborative efforts among legislators, administration agencies, and stakeholders to do just that. The Massachusetts Food Policy Council, established in 2010, works to develop and support programs to bring healthy foods to everyone in the state, and led the development of the state's Local Food Action Plan in 2015. When the 2020 pandemic disrupted food supply chains, recommendations from then Governor's COVID-19 Food Security Task Force led to new programs and transformative investments such as the Food Security Infrastructure Grant program. The Legislature's Food System Caucus is a bipartisan group of leaders crafting and passing bills that build the sustainability and resilience of the state's food system. And the Make Hunger History coalition is an ambitious statewide initiative to end hunger in the Commonwealth.

The Anti-Hunger Task Force's work builds upon these and other initiatives, including the Massachusetts' Special Legislative Commission to Study Poverty's work and recommendations to reduce poverty. The recommendations in this report should be considered alongside larger efforts to increase affordability in Massachusetts, address historic and persistent socioeconomic inequities and enable all residents to meet their own economic mobility goals.

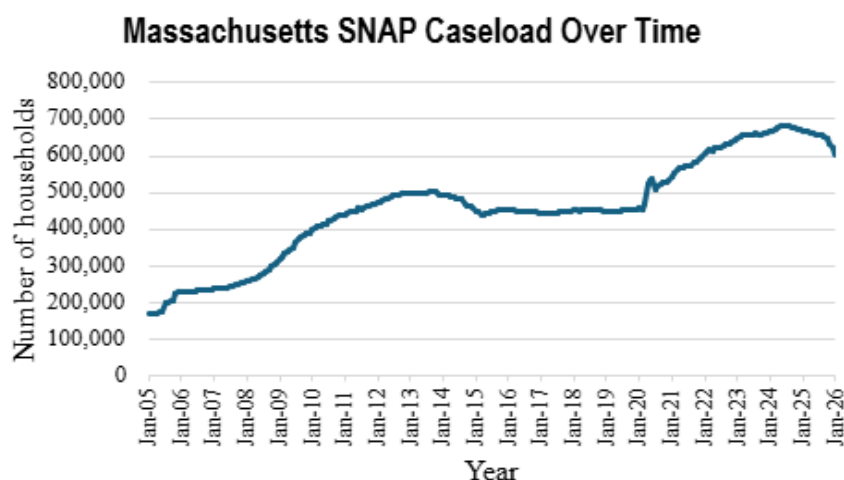
³ Massachusetts Emergency Food Assistance Program (MEFAP) Fiscal Year 2024 Core Food & MassGrown Summary Report. Food Bank Coalition of Massachusetts.

⁴ Rabbitt, M.P., Reed-Jones, M., Hales, L.J., Suttles, S., & Burke, M.P. (2025). Household food security in the United States in 2024 (Report No. ERR-358). U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

The Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) oversees the administration of SNAP benefits in Massachusetts. SNAP is the largest anti-hunger program in the state, serving more than one million low-income people (1 in 7 residents). SNAP provides resources to eligible participants to purchase food that meets their dietary and cultural needs at designated retailers. Of those participating, 32% are children (under age 18), 24% are older adults (age 60 and older), and 28% are people with disabilities.

SNAP is one of the most effective economic stimulants, responding to changes in the economy. Following national trends, the Massachusetts SNAP caseload increased during the 2008 economic recession and then again during the COVID-19 pandemic, following the expiration of federal pandemic-related unemployment assistance in September of 2021. The caseload continued to increase in the following years, coinciding with high food inflation. In 2025, the caseload steadily declined from its post-COVID peak related to many factors, including expiration of COVID-era flexibilities, federal eligibility changes, and increased administrative barriers associated with federal requirements. These trends and the federal cuts to SNAP are particularly concerning given the aforementioned rise in food insecurity rates and demand on the emergency food system. The Department of Transitional Assistance is proactively working to improve access to Department services, including improving access to the assistance line and online tools, to help households enroll or maintain SNAP benefits.



SNAP eligibility is based on certain individual and household-level factors including income and certain expenses. Families in Massachusetts generally must have a gross income below 200% of the federal poverty line to qualify. For example, a family of three must make \$53,304 or less per year.

In Massachusetts, an average household receiving SNAP benefits receives \$323 per month to help buy food, which is \$11 per household a day. SNAP brings \$2.3 billion of federal dollars annually into the state's economy, supporting over 5,500 food retailers. According to Feeding America data, for every meal provided by a food bank, SNAP provides approximately nine meals.

SNAP benefits are more than just monthly funds on an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card to buy food that meets a participant's dietary needs. SNAP participants can also access SNAP Path to Work, which provides free education and training opportunities, as well as connections to other kinds of help, like utility discounts, direct eligibility for Head Start child care, free school meals, and discounted admissions to many Commonwealth museums and cultural institutions through EBT Card to Culture.

Further, SNAP participants can buy more produce when they use their EBT card at participating Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) vendors. HIP is a state-funded supplement for the purchase of fruits and vegetables at farmers markets and community-supported agriculture (CSA) farm share programs, increasing access to healthy foods and providing direct economic benefit to local farmers. Since HIP began in April 2017, SNAP households have purchased more than \$81 million from local farmers in healthy, local foods. More than 206,000 households / 309,000 individuals have used HIP. In August 2025, approximately 9% of SNAP households utilized their HIP benefits.

Benefits of SNAP Participation

Extensive research has demonstrated positive outcomes associated with SNAP participation across the lifespan. SNAP receipt has been linked to reductions in food insecurity,^{5,6} improved health outcomes from birth to old age,^{7,8,9,10} and better educational outcomes for children^{11,12}.

USDA research found that during the high food price inflation in 2022, most U.S. households' food spending remained flat or declined, except for households receiving SNAP benefits¹³. Further, low-income households not receiving SNAP spent \$544 less per capita on food at home (e.g., from grocery stores) than those on SNAP at that time. Historically, low-income households not receiving SNAP have spent less per capita than those participating in the program, but the gap widened in 2021 and 2022. The increased SNAP benefit amounts during the pandemic likely mitigated participating households from experiencing high food inflation and otherwise higher rates of food insecurity.

In addition to individual and household-level benefits, SNAP has been shown to have direct, economic impacts in communities. Data show that every \$1 in SNAP spent results in \$1.54 in economic generation - increasing jobs and bolstering local economies¹⁴.

Federal SNAP Changes

In July 2025, President Donald Trump signed into law the [“One. Big. Beautiful Bill Act.”](#) which was passed by Congressional Republicans and made the largest cut to SNAP in the program's history. These far-reaching cuts will have adverse impacts on people and communities across Massachusetts.

The Trump Administration required states to implement the SNAP eligibility and benefit changes by November 1, 2025, that included:

⁵ Mabli, James, Jim Ohls, Lisa Dragoset, Laura Castner, and Betsy Santos. Measuring the Effect of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Participation on Food Security. Prepared by Mathematica Policy Research for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, August 2013.

⁶ Swann CA. Household history, SNAP participation, and food insecurity. *Food Policy*. 2017;73:1-9.

⁷ Seth A, Seligman HK, Rigdon J, et al. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Participation and Health Care Expenditures Among Low-Income Adults. *JAMA Intern Med*. 2017;177;(11):1642- 649.

⁸ Ettinger de Cuba SA, Bovell-Ammon AR, Cook JT, et al. SNAP, young children's health, and family food security and health-care access. *Am J Prev Med*. 2019;57(4):525-532.

⁹ Bailey MJ, Hoynes H, Rossin-Slater M, Walker R. *The Review of Economic Studies*, Volume 91, Issue 3, May 2024, Pages 1291-1330.

¹⁰ Ettinger de Cuba S, Weiss I, Pasquariello J, Schiffmiller A, Frank DA, Coleman S, Breen A, Cook J. The SNAP Vaccine: Boosting Children's Health. *Children's HealthWatch*, February 2012. Available at: http://childrenshealthwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/snapvaccine_report_feb12.pdf

¹¹ Beharie N, Mercado M, McKay M. A Protective Association between SNAP Participation and Educational Outcomes Among Children of Economically Strained Households. *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition* 2017; 12(2):181-192.

¹² Hoynes H, Schanzenbach DW, Almond D. Long-Run Impacts of Childhood Access to the Safety Net. *American Economic Review*, 2016(106):4:903-934.

¹³ Okrent, A., & Zeballos, E. (2025). U.S. household food spending post COVID-19 and the implications for diet quality (Report No. ERR-348). U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service.

¹⁴ Canning, Patrick and Brian Stacy. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Economy: New Estimates of the SNAP Multiplier, ERR-265, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, July 2019.

Elimination of SNAP-Ed, which provided free nutrition education classes and resources.

- The SNAP-Ed program provided education on healthy eating, cooking, and budgeting, as well as offered a range of resources, including workshops, cooking classes, and online materials to help individuals make informed food choices and adopt healthier lifestyles.
- Massachusetts annually received \$9 million in federal funding that supported these resources/classes and funded 76 people ranging from administrative roles to classroom educators to public health specialists. In federal fiscal year 2025, SNAP-Ed classes reached 46,564 individuals and community nutrition projects reached an estimated 91,404 individuals.

Expansion of strict work requirements

- Removes exceptions for individuals experiencing homelessness, and individuals 24 years and younger who have aged out of foster care.
- Increases the 80 hour per month work requirement from adults aged 54 to 64, expanding the number of older adults subject to work requirements, unless they meet an exemption.
- Makes parents/guardians of children aged 14 and older subject to the 80 hour a month work rules, unless they meet an exemption.
- Removes waiver options for areas with high unemployment or locally few job opportunities.
- **Approximately 99,000 Massachusetts residents may be newly subject to strict work requirements over the next year.**

Restriction of eligibility for immigrants lawfully living in the U.S.

- Eliminates eligibility for certain immigrants granted humanitarian protection by the federal government, including refugees, people granted asylum, and survivors of domestic violence and sex trafficking.
- **Approximately 9,500 Massachusetts immigrant residents may lose their SNAP eligibility over the next year.**

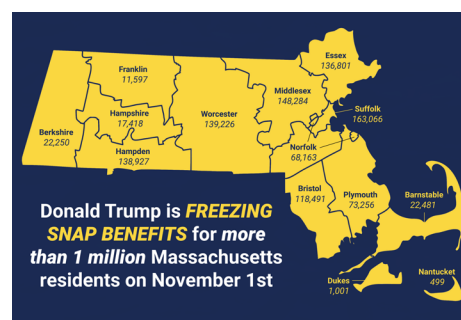
Reduction of benefit amounts

- Restricts an automatic deduction in utility costs to only certain households with an older adult or disabled member.
- Utility costs are deducted from countable income, which can increase a household's SNAP benefit amount. Under these changes, **approximately 45,000 households are at risk of having their benefits reduced over the next year.**

The bill also included provisions that will have future SNAP impacts, and so require preparation:

- Establishes a **benefit cost-share with states** tied to payment accuracy measures starting in Federal Fiscal Year 2028, which could result in up to **\$400 million in new annual costs for Massachusetts.**
- **Increases the administrative cost share for states from 50% to 75%** starting in Federal Fiscal Year 2027, resulting in **\$53 million in additional annual costs for Massachusetts.**
- Limits increases in the Thrifty Food Plan calculation, the cost basis for SNAP benefit amounts, which will **erode the value of SNAP benefits over time**

SAVE SNAP
FEED OUR FAMILIES



These devastating changes are on top of additional funding cuts and research and program dismantlements President Trump previously made, including cancelling [\\$12 million](#) in funding for Massachusetts to provide local, healthy food to child care programs and schools, [\\$3.4 million](#) from a program that provided food to food banks, and another \$6 million from a program that purchased food from local farmers to provide healthy local food to families in need. The Trump Administration also [terminated future Household Food Security Reports](#), leaving the country with no standard, annual understanding of food security needs. President Trump continually tried to restrict or cut funding of SNAP benefits during the fall 2025 federal shutdown and laid off staff at the USDA, including the Food and Nutrition Service's Northeast Boston regional office.



Establishing the Task Force

Directly following President Trump and Congressional Republican cuts to SNAP, Governor Healey signed an [Executive Order](#) creating an Anti-Hunger Task Force to identify solutions that would prevent Massachusetts families from going hungry. The Task Force was charged with producing recommendations for how Massachusetts can mitigate against President Trump's cuts to SNAP and other food assistance programs and adopt long-term solutions to hunger.

The 50-person Task Force is a public-private partnership that has brought together leaders from state and local government, food banks and retailers, non-profits and business leaders, as well as those who are directly impacted by federal cuts, such as SNAP recipients, farmers and small business owners (see Appendix for full list of members). Additional individuals and organizations also participate in working groups. It is co-chaired by Allison Bovell-Ammon, Assistant Undersecretary for Children & Family Services at the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS); Ashley Randle, Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR); and Alana Davidson, Director of Communications at the Massachusetts Executive Office of Education (EOE).

The Task Force is working in coordination with existing food security initiatives in Massachusetts, including Make Hunger History, a statewide, cross-sector initiative of more than 300 organizations led by Project Bread to create a coordinated, community-informed roadmap to end hunger in Massachusetts.

Additional Massachusetts Mitigation Efforts To-Date

In addition to the establishment of the Anti-Hunger Task Force, the administration, in partnership with the Legislature, has taken steps to mitigate against the harmful SNAP cuts and policy changes:

- Governor Healey signed a [supplemental budget in November 2025](#) that included an additional \$10 million to support operations at DTA.

- In response to feedback from members of the Task Force on the urgent need to expand DTA workforce, DTA has hired 76 additional staff in fiscal year 2026 at local offices to help process paperwork, recertify benefits, and connect with clients. Task Force members continue to request additional staff beyond the recent increase to further expand staff capacity to process benefits.

To avoid escalating cost-share penalties and preserve SNAP, DTA is taking steps to rapidly reduce the state's payment error rate while seeking to maintain and improve access to benefits for which households are eligible, including:

- Establishing a dedicated Quality Assurance team of highly skilled case workers to support payment accuracy efforts.
- Improving technology platforms and phone lines to bolster eligibility and benefit determination work and improve client ability to report changes.
- Leveraging internal and external data to identify and correct errors when necessary.
- Enhancing staff development and training programs to focus on areas with high risk of errors.
- Unwinding COVID-era policies and reinstating household interviews at recertification and requiring verifying income matches at interim report.

During the unprecedented lapse in SNAP benefits during the federal government shutdown, the Anti-Hunger Task Force and the Healey-Driscoll Administration acted swiftly to respond to the urgency of food insecurity issues facing residents of the Commonwealth. Every organization and member of the Task Force played a role in responding to the crisis created by the federal shutdown. Efforts included:

- Advancement of \$4 million in state funding to food banks across Massachusetts to support access to food through the emergency food system;
- Rapid expansion of public-private partnerships to respond to needs, including increasing access to supports through Project Bread's Food Source Hotline and rapid deployment of resources to communities across the Commonwealth through United Way's United Response Fund;
- Deployment of emergency food resources in communities through food pantries, community-based organizations, municipalities, schools, child care centers, senior centers, home delivered meals, and more;
- Up-to-date communications and information to residents through Mass.gov to reduce confusion; and
- Swift action by DTA to ensure full benefits were issued as quickly as possible, making Massachusetts one of the first states to restore benefits.

In January 2026, Governor Healey filed her annual budget, which included multiple requests for increased funding for anti-hunger initiatives listed below and continued investment in DTA staff. Separately, the Governor also filed legislation that would establish a new state tax credit for farmers donating food to anti-hunger initiatives. Across the programs listed below, the Governor's budget includes \$338M in anti-hunger program investments, representing a nearly 12% increase over FY26 funding levels.



Department	Program	State FY26 Budget (\$)	Governor's FY27 Budget Proposal (\$)
MDAR	Emergency Food Assistance Program (MEFAP)	50,575,000	55,000,000
DESE	School Breakfast and Summer Meals	4,467,639	4,429,965
	School Lunch Program	5,314,176	5,314,176
	Universal School Meals	180,000,000	198,000,000
DHE	Hunger-Free Campus Pilot Program	500,000	500,000
DTA	Food Stamp Participation Rate Programs	5,294,419	5,762,115
	Supplemental Nutrition Program	8,276,185	11,000,000
	Healthy Incentives Program (HIP)	20,100,000	29,700,000
DPH	Women Infants and Children Nutrition Services (WIC)	15,489,915	15,500,388
AGE	Nutrition Services Program	12,757,217	13,410,963
Total		\$302,774,551	\$338,617,607

Task Force Engagement

The Anti-Hunger Task Force met five times from August through December 2025 to discuss ways to mitigate the impacts of the SNAP cuts, as well as during the federal government shutdown to address urgent impacts on individuals and communities. In addition to the full Task Force meetings, three working groups were established to go deeper into each area: increasing access to food assistance for directly impacted populations; building rural resiliency and sustaining local food systems; and funding opportunities and scaling solutions: philanthropy and advocacy. The food assistance working group was further broken down into three subgroups: immigrants, older adults and people with disabilities, and children with families. These subgroups also met throughout the fall.

In addition to full Task Force and working group meetings, the Task Force held six listening sessions across the state to hear directly from residents, local government, retailers, food pantries, farmers, schools, and other community members. This included two virtual sessions and in-person sessions in Dighton, Springfield, Charlton, and Haverhill. The listening sessions were facilitated by Monte Belmonte, host and executive producer of New England Public Media's *The Fabulous 413*. Feedback from the sessions focused on the Task Force's [four key objectives](#), including mitigating the direct and indirect impacts of federal SNAP cuts and program changes to Massachusetts; initiating and deepening collaboration for alleviating food insecurity; and exploring long-term, sustainable solutions for mitigating hunger, preserving food systems, and bolstering local economies.

Some of the main themes discussed during these sessions were:

- Communities across the Commonwealth have developed partnerships and models that are responsive to their neighbors' needs, strengths, and challenges, but most systems are at or near capacity, and more resources and supports are needed to respond to growing demand on emergency food systems and local resources;
- Accessibility to SNAP benefits, HIP, and other nutrition programs is critically important and ensuring systems are strengthened to improve access is key to mitigating federal nutrition cuts;
- Clear communication of what federal changes are and their impact on residents as well as where people can turn to for help is critical;
- The Commonwealth should work to identify ways to mitigate federal funding cuts, including for SNAP Nutrition Education, Local Food Purchasing Agreements, Local Food for Schools grants, and eligibility changes in SNAP, and restore access to programs impacted by federal actions;
- There are opportunities to build on existing infrastructure and leverage underutilized resources, such as vacant land for farming, food recovery, and gleaning opportunities, to increase access to food;
- High costs of living, including high grocery prices, rent, and utilities impact food insecurity and should be addressed; and
- State agencies, municipalities, philanthropy, emergency food networks, community-based organizations, grassroots coalitions, farmers, fishers, producers, retailers, health care organizations, and more all have a role to play in reducing food insecurity and identifying opportunities to coordinate and strengthen efforts will be important to scaling solutions.

Progress in Massachusetts

The Anti-Hunger Task Force builds on work this administration, in partnership with the Legislature, has made in promoting food security and local, healthy food. Notable examples of this work include, but are not limited to:

Made universal school meals permanent

With the signing of the fiscal 2024 budget, Governor Healey made universal free school meals permanent. Massachusetts remains one of only eight states to continue universal free school meals after the COVID-19 pandemic federal free universal meals ended. Universal free school meals have led to an increase in breakfast and lunch participation. Data for the 2023-24 school year shows an increase of 8.3 million meals served compared to the 2022-23 school year. With support from a combination of state and federal funding, 7 out of 10 students in Massachusetts public schools eat a free and healthy breakfast or lunch at school.

Awarded first restaurants and food trucks to participate in SNAP Restaurant Meals Program pilot

Currently, 13 restaurants and food trucks participate in the SNAP Restaurant Meals Program (RMP) pilot, opening up access for clients in Boston, Chelsea, Brockton, Worcester, Fall River, and Greenfield. Under federal rules, the RMP allows individuals with disabilities, households with older adults aged 60 and up, and individuals experiencing homelessness to use their SNAP benefits at select, participating restaurants and food trucks that offer reduced-price meal options. Of the selected local businesses, 77% were women-owned and 90% had owners who identify as Black, Asian and/or Hispanic/Latinx. The average meal price was \$11. For fiscal year 2025, Massachusetts clients completed a total of 7,489 transactions at approved restaurants.

Launched SUN Bucks

The administration launched the new federal SUN Bucks program in summer 2024. This program provides grocery money to eligible low-income families with school-aged children in the summer months to buy food when schools are closed. In 2025, [MA SUN Bucks](#) provided \$62.8M to 348,355 households to buy food for nearly 532,907 school-aged children and their families.

Increased MEFAP funding

Governor Healey in signing the [fiscal year 2024 state budget](#) increased MA Emergency Food Assistance Program (MEFAP) funding by \$5.5 million with total funding at \$35.5 million. This funding continued to increase to \$41.5 million in fiscal year 2025 and \$49.5 million in fiscal year 2026. Governor Healey's [fiscal year 2027 budget](#) proposes \$55 million for the program. MEFAP ensures a consistent supply of quality nutrient-dense foods and locally-grown fresh produce to a statewide network of over 900 emergency food providers through the state's four food banks.

Provided an off-ramp to the abrupt end of the extra federal COVID SNAP benefits

The Families First Coronavirus Relief Act created temporary, extra SNAP benefits, known as SNAP Emergency Allotments. During the COVID-19 pandemic, SNAP emergency allotments allowed households to receive the maximum SNAP benefit amount for their household size, with a minimum benefit amount of \$95 a month. The Congressional Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 ended these payments as of February 2023.

Governor Healey's [signing of a supplemental budget](#) in March of 2023 created an off-ramp from the extra COVID SNAP benefits, investing \$130 million in state dollars. The state-funded extra SNAP benefits were available in the beginning of April, May, and June 2023. As directed by the supplemental budget, the payment amounts were up to 40% of the difference between a household's maximum benefit amount for their household size and their regular monthly benefit amount, with a minimum amount of \$38 a month.

Suspended the limit for the number of shopping bags allowed on public transit in Western Massachusetts

While visiting Berkshire County in the fall of 2025, Health and Human Services Secretary Mahaniah heard directly from community members that challenges to food accessibility are further exacerbated by limits on the number of shopping bags they could carry on public transit. Following the visit, the Secretary contacted MassDOT to convey this barrier and they immediately took action to suspend indefinitely the shopping bag limit. This change went into effect in November 2025 on all public transit operated by Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA) and the Berkshire Regional Transit Authority.

This decisive action directly relates to the [Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan](#) Recommendation 7.5: Increase the number of shopping bags that are allowed to be carried on public transit authority buses and trains, and Action 7.5.2: Increase the capacity of transit vehicles to carry more shopping bags safely.

Recommendations

The [“One, Big, Beautiful Bill Act”](#) changes to SNAP will have devastating effects now and into the future. The administration and Task Force will continue to advocate that Congress and the Trump Administration reverse these cuts and policy changes.

In the absence of federal action, the recommendations below provide opportunities for the Commonwealth to invest in efforts that mitigate food insecurity, strengthen systems that bolster access to food, and implement cross-sector strategies for supporting residents with low incomes, farmers, grocers, and communities. As the largest and most effective anti-hunger program, promoting and expanding access to SNAP is the cornerstone of success. The Task Force recommends the Healey-Driscoll Administration consider intentional and sustainable solutions and work with legislative partners, community-based organizations, municipalities, businesses, farmers, fishers, advocates, and more to keep healthy food available to residents of Massachusetts.

Consistent with the preamble and objectives of [Executive Order 643](#), the proposed recommendations address five areas: supporting and strengthening SNAP infrastructure and clients; maximizing other federal nutrition programs; supporting the emergency food system; building rural resiliency and sustaining local food systems; and deepening public-private partnerships.



Supporting and strengthening SNAP clients and infrastructure

These recommendations focus on investing in efforts to ensure that eligible clients can obtain and maintain their SNAP benefits and that the state is able to reduce its error rate.



- DTA infrastructure support:** Support DTA operations, technology, and staffing by investing in administrative functions, leveraging resources within the Administration, and requesting resources to improve infrastructure and provide robust support to the Department to take necessary steps to meet new federal obligations required to preserve SNAP benefits for residents of Massachusetts¹⁵. In addition, continue to balance these changes with efforts that improve customer service and support access to benefits among eligible households in the Commonwealth, including eligible residents not currently participating in SNAP. These efforts should include, but not be limited to, increasing phone line response rates, enhancing client self-service tools, enhancing data sharing tools, upgrading technology systems that are critical to case work, reducing caseload ratios, and supporting frontline staff to respond to federal policy requirements, including screening for work requirement exemptions, conducting robust interviews, and ensuring cases are processed accurately to avoid payment errors.
- SNAP loss mitigation:** Assess operational feasibility and identify possible resource availability for creating new programs, including state administered supports, for people previously eligible for SNAP, including legally present humanitarian immigrants losing SNAP. Federal eligibility changes to SNAP stemming from the One Big Beautiful Bill Act place previously eligible, low-income residents at risk of becoming ineligible for SNAP benefits. The Administration should assess options for developing new programs or building upon existing programs to mitigate loss of SNAP, subject to available resources.
- Robust outreach:** Conduct robust outreach campaign to ensure clients and communities are aware of the federal changes impacting eligibility, SNAP work rule exemptions, and immigration eligibility. This outreach should be in multiple languages and include where to receive assistance, including through train-the-trainer and peer-to-peer support models. There should be broad engagement, including with school, health care entities/pediatricians, higher education, caregiver coalitions, veteran service organizations and the faith community. Outreach strategies should be accessible to older adults and people with disabilities, including plain language material, large-print formats, and in-person or phone-based assistance. This outreach should include awareness of the benefits of receiving SNAP for eligible children in mixed-immigrant families, how to claim any applicable exemptions for the work rules and the many ways non-exempt adults can fulfill work requirements through education and training programs, unpaid work, paid work, volunteer activities, or a combination of activities.

¹⁵ Operational metrics and improvement tracking published by DTA in monthly Performance Scorecards available at: [DTA Performance Scorecards](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/dta-performance-scorecards) | Mass.gov

- **SNAP outreach partners:** Identifying funding sources to mitigate federal loss of funds for SNAP outreach partners and seek opportunities to expand the number of SNAP outreach partners in impacted communities. Expansion efforts should include engaging population specific organizations such as Councils on Aging, SHINE, Options Counseling, and Aging Services Access Points, that can assist older adults with claiming exemptions to the work requirements/meeting the expanded requirements, health care entities to enroll MassHealth members, education institutions to assist students and their families and providers serving people experiencing homelessness.
- **Outreach materials toolkit:** Provide new multilingual, accessible outreach materials in plain language that organizations and communities can use. This includes sample robocall, text message, email, and social media copy language, as well as graphics that promote information on how to apply for SNAP and explain new federal requirements.
- **Work requirement exemptions:** Ensure robust screening of clients at DTA who may qualify for an exemption from strict work rules because they have a condition that inhibits their ability to work and support access to exemptions through education and outreach campaigns, community-based partnerships, and cross-agency collaboration.
- **Employment and training:** Identify opportunities to expand meaningful employment and training opportunities. This includes, but is not limited to, engaging with philanthropy to maximize federal resources for onboarding SNAP Path to Work providers and providing support stipends for clients participating in non-SNAP Path to Work opportunities like transportation and site capacity, as well as providing devices and internet access for virtual education and training programs.. DTA should also collaborate with the Department of Higher Education to examine opportunities to promote free community college and career and technical vocational programs.
- **Community service:** Partner with community organizations to identify meaningful and accessible volunteer activities that reduce barriers to meeting requirements, including offering virtual options, waiving fees for criminal background checks, and identifying opportunities to provide child care and transportation support. Additionally, provide training to community service host organizations on Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWD) rules, including exemption eligibility and process for claiming an exemption.
- **Guidance on accessing public benefits:** Create and share multi-lingual guidance around accessing public benefits during a changing federal legal landscape for immigrants, ensuring that mixed status households with members still eligible for SNAP are aware of their eligibility. Guidance should be clear and accessible and informed in response to feedback from immigrant communities on what information is needed and how to best deliver communications.
- **Supports for immigrant families:** Promote opportunities to support access to immigration legal services for lawfully present immigrants seeking to take steps to become a legal permanent resident, including but not limited to, developing and deepening partnerships with trusted CBOs, legal aid and other legal services to host clinics and provide pro bono or reduced cost services for immigrants with low incomes. Additionally, the administration should seek to collaborate with immigrant-led and immigrant-serving organizations to promote accurate information about SNAP and engage in outreach efforts to ensure eligible immigrants continue to access to the program.

- **Healthy Incentives Program (HIP):** Ensure adequate funding at the beginning of each fiscal year for HIP and codify the program into law to enable sustainable outreach and expanded vendors/access points. This includes evaluating the ability to increase the number of HIP vendors based on needs of rural, suburban and urban communities and gaps in geographic distribution of vendors, as well as conducting strategic planning around the diversity of vendors and diversity of clients served.

Maximizing Nutrition Programs

The following recommendations focus on maximizing other nutrition programs to help families who have lost or are at risk of losing their SNAP benefits or who are receiving a reduced benefit amount to buy and access healthy food.

- **Women Infant & Children (WIC) outreach:** Support child retention in the WIC program, which provides nutrition education and counseling, referrals to other health and human services, and free health foods to pregnant and postpartum individuals and children until their 5th birthday, through targeted, robust outreach in health care and community settings and via program modernization to minimize declines in participation after infancy.
- **Farmers market participation:** Explore funding opportunities for WIC and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program to ensure consistency and sustainability of program operations. Further, leverage existing innovative models to expand access and modernize the experience¹⁶.



¹⁶The federal WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program had a 48% reduction in funding in FY25 from the prior fiscal year, and current estimates suggest similar reductions for FY26. To have the greatest impact serving this priority population with lowered funding, the program moved from providing each eligible participant with a \$30 benefit¹⁶, to providing each household with a \$30 benefit.

The federal Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) had a 22% reduction in the number of low-income older adults that the program could serve through the coupon and homebound program in FY25. ARPA funding provided a financial boost to the program, allowing for several thousand eligible low-income older adults to receive this benefit in FY23 and FY24. The loss of ARPA funding combined with slightly reduced funding for FY25 saw a surge in demand for the food benefit among a vulnerable population at a time of record high food costs.



- Child nutrition program participation:** Increase school breakfast, Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) (child care/supper), and summer meal participation in impacted communities. The new public dashboard referenced below will be used to assist this intentional outreach, identifying low-income school districts and communities that have significant gaps in participation and the needed support for additional CACFP and summer meal sponsors. Provide support to after school programs in low-income communities that do not provide snacks or supper for kids¹⁷.
- Senior nutrition program access:** Strengthen and expand Older Americans Act nutrition programs, including congregate meals, home-delivered meals, and medically tailored meals to ensure older adults, particularly those with low incomes, disabilities, chronic health conditions, or mobility limitations, can access nutritious meals. Coordinate food access offered via CACFP in the adult day health program settings with emergency food funding to support senior housing and community dining sites as reliable meal access points by reducing gaps between programs, strengthening shared infrastructure, and ensuring older adults receive consistent, nutritious meals across settings. This includes stabilizing and expanding congregate meals, supporting home-delivered meals for homebound older adults, and advancing medically tailored meal models. Efforts should reduce operational barriers, strengthen local provider capacity, expand outreach to communities most impacted by SNAP eligibility changes, and align with MassHealth health-related social needs (HRSN) initiatives through screening, referral pathways, and coordination with health care and aging services.
- Publicly available data:** Create a public data dashboard on nutrition program participation to understand access and gaps to further improve program administration (e.g., CACFP, school lunch, school breakfast, WIC, summer meals, senior nutrition programs, SUNBucks, SNAP). The dashboard would be on the state's government website and updated at least annually. This includes annual participation in nutrition programs by geography, year, and other demographic factors such as participation in other means tested programs to assess gaps, as well as by meal type when appropriate.

¹⁷ Under state-supported universal free school meals, school breakfast participation increased by 78,000 students from 2019 to 2024, a 36 percent increase. However, the number of students who eat lunch each day is still about double the number who eat breakfast.

CACFP is a federal program that provides reimbursements for meals and snacks served to children enrolled at eligible participating child care programs, after school programs, children residing in emergency shelters, and adults over the age of 60 or living with a disability and enrolled in day care facilities. This includes participating after school programs being able to serve snacks or supper to kids and teens with their enrichment activities. Compared with national trends, Massachusetts has seen a less significant reduction in CACFP participation (3% in MA compared with 6% nationally), however Massachusetts supper participation has not rebounded from the pandemic, with 1.2 million suppers served in 2016 compared to nearly 760,000 in 2024.

The federal summer meals program (known as Summer Eats in Massachusetts) provides children 18 years of age and younger with free, healthy meals over the summer months when they no longer have access to school meals. Meal sites include schools and other community locations, from parks to summer camps. Last summer, on average, 59,000 kids received a meal daily, with 2.5 million meals being served in total. That is lower than the number of students who eat lunch (584,000 students) and breakfast (272,000 students) at school during the school year. Summer meal service opportunities are limited by eligibility requirements, and summer sites are challenged by access limitations.

- **CACFP reimbursement rates and participation:** Advocate for Congress and the federal government to increase CACFP rates and explore opportunities to supplement rates for meals and sponsors, subject to available resources. CACFP programs receive federal reimbursements for meals based on program type, meal type and income of program/families, as well as administrative reimbursement rates for family child care sponsoring organizations. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress increased reimbursement rates for family child care providers by eliminating the tiered approach. This temporary increase in reimbursement amounts was found to increase participation and retention of participating family child care programs and improve quality of meals served^{18,19,20,21}.
- **High-nutritional quality school meals:** In alignment with the School Meals Nutrition Standards Commission's recommendations, explore efforts to increase scratch cooking, source local foods and products, and engage and expand culinary training and regional culinary center district partnerships for school meals. Higher quality school meals lead to higher participation, and universal free school meals have increased schools' capacity to receive and prepare meals with minimally processed ingredients. Support districts in navigating state and federal procurement processes to procure local produce and utilize district partnerships to maximize purchasing power. As of the 2022-2023 school year, 68% of Massachusetts schools included local food in their meals²².
- **College food security:** Continue investing in the hunger-free campus initiative and explore universal campus meal plans that could be included in student aid packages. The hunger-free campus initiative supports college and university anti-hunger efforts, such as SNAP outreach, EBT grocers on campus, collaboration with food pantries, food lockers and grab-and-go stations, and provide grocery and meal vouchers and cafeteria meal swipes. Financial aid packages typically help cover the cost of tuition, fees, books/supplies and room and board, and some cost of living expenses. Students may supplement these costs with loans, scholarships and work study. In addition to the devastating cuts to SNAP in the "One, Big, Beautiful Bill Act", the legislation also eliminated Grad PLUS loans and capped other loans, reducing public options for students to get help paying for basic needs.
- **Nutrition education:** Identify opportunities to fund high quality nutrition education programs that promote partnerships and opportunities to expand healthy eating across the Commonwealth, especially given federal disinvestment in evidence-based SNAP Nutrition Education programs.

¹⁸ Bacon KA, Lee DL, Vasicsek R, Felix C, Marshall S KD, Vitale EH, Matias SL, Ritchie LD. Provider, sponsor and family perceptions of Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) participation and COVID-19 reimbursement increases. *Public Health Nutr.* 2025 Nov 3;28(1):e195.

¹⁹ Ritchie LD, Bacon KA, Felix C, Lee DL, Marshall SK, Homel Vitale E, Matias SL. Child and Adult Care Food Program: Family Childcare Home Providers' Perceptions of Impacts of Increased Meal and Snack Reimbursement Rates during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Nutrients.* 2024 Sep 25;16(19):3241.

²⁰ Gearing, M., Gola, A.A., Manglitz, C., Flores Cervantes, I., Collins, M., & Iles, O. (2024). Family Day Care Home Participation Study: Written Summary. Westat. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. This report was conducted by Westat, under Contract No. GS-00F-009DA/12319821F0061 with the USDA Food and Nutrition Service.

²¹ Lee D, Bacon K, Felix C, Marshall S MA, Vitale EH, Matias S, Ritchie L. Impact of Increased Child and Adult Care Food Program Reimbursement Rates for Family Child Care Home Providers in California. *Journal of Nutr Ed and Behavior.* 2024;56(8) S30.

²² United States Department of Agriculture. 2023 Farm to School Census: Massachusetts (MA). Accessed online January 2023: <https://farmtoschoolcensus.fns.usda.gov/census-results/states/ma>

SNAP participation is linked to several federal nutrition programs. Receiving SNAP benefits streamlines eligibility to the WIC program. School districts receive federal reimbursement for breakfast and lunch served, in part based on the number of students who receive SNAP benefits. Families who receive SNAP are also directly eligible for SUN Bucks, an electronic benefits transfer card that allows families with children to purchase additional groceries in the summer. Further, the number of SNAP participants in a geographic area impacts which areas are eligible to provide Summer Eats sites and CACFP suppers and reimbursement level for family child care programs. These recommendations also focus on ways the state can mitigate against the downstream impacts to other federal nutrition programs, such as:

- **School meals:** Identify school districts that have their community eligibility provision (CEP) renewal date in the next year and an identified student percentage (ISP) rate near the cut off to boost SNAP application outreach to increase direct certification numbers.
- **Summer and afterschool/supper:** Identify Summer Eats and CACFP afterschool and supper meal sites that have an area eligibility close to 50% (31.25% CEP site ISP) to explore redetermining eligibility that would extend area eligibility for five more years.



Supporting the Emergency Food System

These recommendations focus on access to food through partnerships with local food banks, pantries, and food access organizations who are best positioned to respond to short-term needs of residents needing immediate assistance.

- **Safe food pantry access:** Urgently create food pantry specific guidance related to immigration enforcement and offer robust trainings and materials on it, including a convening for food pantries with legal aid experts to discuss best practices/strategies and identifying opportunities and partnerships to assist organizations in developing agency-specific plans for emergency response.
- **Food delivery/boxes:** Explore funding mechanisms to establish or expand food delivery, prepared meals, and food box programs, including partnering with organizations, including but not limited to those that serve homebound or isolated older adults and immigrants concerned about accessing food distribution sites to safely provide access to food that meets people's dietary needs. Prioritize inclusion of MA-grown and -produced products in food boxes.



- MA Emergency Food Assistance Program (MEFAP):** Continue to invest in MEFAP and identify opportunities to increase the program's purchase of locally produced foods directly from local farms, producers, fisheries, and food hubs. This includes assessing the capacity and needs of local producers (e.g., logistical, price points, and supply chain challenges) to supply more food into the emergency feeding system. Regularly review and update targets for MEFAP funding to source Massachusetts grown, raised, and harvested foods, as well as from bordering states to further bolster the local food supply chain and increase fresh and local food access for food insecure communities. Provide support and education to farmers who are exploring becoming MEFAP suppliers, including smaller and diverse farms, and establish a tracking system to measure progress towards diversifying suppliers to MEFAP.
- Mutual aid:** Partner with mutual aid organizations and engage with grassroots community organizations to support community food security efforts. Mutual aid organizations, by definition, are comprised of community members supporting each other through the exchange of resources. As such, they are uniquely positioned to respond rapidly to the immediate needs of their neighbors. During the November 2025 federal government shutdown, mutual aid efforts across the Commonwealth included examples of restaurants providing free, pay-what-you-can or pay-it-forward meals, neighbors contributing to community refrigerators, and farmers providing free produce, milk, or eggs. While these efforts are deeply community driven, they are often overlooked by funders and policymakers. Identifying opportunities to support, amplify, and partner with mutual aid organizations builds upon community strength and assets to reduce food insecurity at the local level.
- Resource databases:** Work with local, regional, and statewide leaders to compile and promote information on food resources across the state for people seeking assistance. Multiple organizations, including local community-based organizations, municipalities, regional food banks, and statewide groups, have developed food resources to meet the needs of their clients or constituents, but to-date, there is no repository of those resources statewide that can be easily accessed by residents in need of supports. Collating and promoting accessible, multi-lingual resources on food resources provides an opportunity to increase awareness of supports within communities.

Building Rural Resiliency and Sustaining Local Food Systems

This set of recommendations focuses on addressing challenges in rural communities disproportionately impacted by SNAP cuts and identifying opportunities to support local food systems.

- **Grocery prices:** Examine ways to strengthen consumer education on existing state consumer protection laws and regulations that increase affordability and ensure fair and accurate pricing. Massachusetts currently has some of the strongest consumer protection laws in the country and the Healey-Driscoll Administration has prioritized regulatory reform efforts that improve grocery pricing.
- **Federal local purchasing:** Advocate for Congress and the federal government to re-establish the Local Food Purchasing Agreement (LFPA) and Local Food for Schools programs (e.g., through the federal [*Local Farmers Feeding Our Communities Act*](#)), and explore state-level program opportunities subject to available resources. LFPA was a successful federally-funded program that operated in Massachusetts over two rounds totaling \$14 million and was eliminated by the USDA in 2025, with \$7 million of funding terminated right before the 2025 growing season. LFPA was a transformative program that provided public funds for community-based organizations to purchase food from Massachusetts farmers to distribute food to insecure families. It was a flexible, urgent response that was complementary to the more large-scale food banking model by directly connecting small-scale historically underserved farmers and fishers with trusted community-based intermediaries that provided food to communities experiencing food insecurity and with barriers to accessing food pantries. Through Local Food for Schools, Massachusetts received \$3.5 million in federal funding that enabled 230 School Food Authorities to purchase local food grown, raised, or harvested within 400 miles during the 2023-2024 school year.
 - If re-established, future LFPA and LFS programs should connect with Tribal Governments and Native-led non-profits to ensure support for Indigenous foodways and food distribution programs, as well as support food donations through technical assistance and funding to help intermediaries administer the funds.
- **State local purchasing:** Update the budget language for MEFAP to allow for funding to be dispersed to food access intermediaries to procure directly from small and underserved producers, specifically when there is a unique circumstance such as a more rural community that could buy more directly from local farms and fishers (e.g., rural areas, Cape and Islands). Also, explore funding mechanisms to allow for more small and underserved producers to sell directly to food access organizations and sites, similar to LFPA.
- **Food Security Infrastructure Grant (FSIG) Program:** FSIG supports initiatives that improve food security and ensure equitable access to locally grown, raised, harvested, and caught foods by strengthening Massachusetts' food supply chain. Encourage support for the Mass Ready Act proposal for \$125 million in dedicated authorization for the FSIG program. Future grants should prioritize impacts to areas most impacted by the SNAP eligibility changes and other federal policy safety net changes, in addition to transportation, distribution, and middle of the supply chain gaps, particularly in rural areas, for farm and seafood businesses. Attention should also be paid to regional equity of grant awards across the state.



- **State tax credit for farmers/producers/fishers/processors who are donating food:** Develop a state tax credit that supports farmers/producers, fishers and seafood processors who donate food, like Senator Comerford and Representative Kane's legislation *An Act Encouraging the Donation of Food to Persons In Need*, which is also reflected in a supplemental budget filed by Governor Healey.
- **MDAR's Land Licensing Program:** Explore expanding MDAR's land licensing program to support farmland access for food production for new, beginning, and immigrant farmers, as well as to improve access to land for production of local fruits, vegetables, culturally relevant crops, and meat. This also includes funding for infrastructure, such as irrigation, as well as resources and technical assistance for licensees in order to ensure the farmland is productive and the farms are successful. Further, explore opportunities to connect County Sheriffs' farms to emergency feeding system network and state land licensing program to expand production.
- **Technology access in rural communities:** Explore partnerships and funding opportunities to address technological barriers to food access programs in rural communities. This includes working with the MA Broadband Institute and municipalities to enhance connectivity at farmers market locations, equipping markets and retail outlets with greater connectivity so farmers and participants can access food benefit programs that increasingly rely on technological solutions.
- **Transportation access in rural communities:** Explore ways to strengthen access to public transportation to critical food access points, which is often cited as a key barrier for rural residents to access food. This includes assessing needs, grant opportunities and collaborative initiatives, and expanding upon successful models for micro and last-mile transit such as bike shares and villages.
- **Workforce development in the local food system:** Assess ways to strengthen the local food system workforce through research of existing state models, like [Maine's recently published report](#), as well as the needs of the state's Agricultural High Schools and career technical schools to prepare the next generation food system workforce.
- **Agricultural Food Safety Improvement Program (AFSIP):** Explore food safety programming and funding opportunities that support produce, aquaculture, and wild-caught seafood operations to improve food safety practices that minimize risks of microbial contamination and food-borne illnesses while increasing market access. Lack of food safety trainings and certification are often a barrier to market access and food donation opportunities.
- **MassWildlife's Hunters Share the Harvest Program (MWHSH):** Deepen public-private partnerships to increase capacity for MWHSH. The MWHSH program acts as a secure, in-state backstop to any food program disruptions by the federal government and provides a fresh, local source of protein in high demand by local distributors. Explore sustainable funding sources to cover deer processing costs, program coordination, distribution, and equipment, and coordinate with the Department of Public Health to update custom slaughter regulations to clarify the legal standing of free-ranging wild game processing.
- **Our Fish Our Plate (Share the Catch) pilot:** Explore partnership opportunities that increase access to seafood, bolster demand for local fish, and strengthen the local seafood system. Share the Catch provides locally caught seafood to food banks for distribution to food insecure residents. This includes support for seafood purchases and promotion and research on the success of the initial pilot program. Further, seafood should continue to be included in any future local food distribution and infrastructure programs, including LFPA/LFS and FSIG.

- **Plant the Future Grant:** Explore establishing targeted funding to help Massachusetts farmers establish orchards, vineyards, and other perennial crop systems (e.g., apples, pears, walnuts), including through existing state grant programs that can incentivize more planting of edible perennial crops (e.g., FSIG, Urban Ag, Greening the Gateway). Farmers could receive funding to support the purchase of trees, plants, vines, and necessary planting costs and then four to five years after planting additional funding to support good management and plant survival.



Deepening Public-Private Partnerships

This set of recommendations focuses on maximizing funding opportunities and supporting sustainable solutions for ongoing challenges created by SNAP cuts.

- **Strategic fundraising campaign:** Create a clear, dedicated fundraising campaign to coordinate philanthropy and establish mechanisms for communication, transparency, and collaboration to support food security responses statewide with a focus on local and regional solutions. Funding raised through the campaign should be directed to strategic priorities identified by the Task Force and stakeholders and informed by evidence-based solutions to address funding gaps created by federal disinvestment in nutrition programs.
- **Cross-sector partnerships:** Support and expand grant opportunities for partnerships between anti-hunger organizations, community-based groups and agriculture organizations to feed residents, including Local Food Policy Councils.
- **Municipal engagement:** Engage municipalities and regional planning entities to incorporate food security pillars into municipal planning initiatives to promote access to food through cross-cutting initiatives. Several municipalities across the Commonwealth incorporate food access into planning efforts and promote initiatives across their cities and towns. Amplifying best practices and gleaned lessons learned from these efforts to share across municipalities may further bolster efforts at the local level.
- **Access to benefits:** Identify philanthropic opportunities for assisting residents with low incomes to remain connected to SNAP, including through investment in opportunities for residents to meet strict work requirements and support for SNAP outreach providers impacted by federal cuts. Specifically, philanthropic investments can leverage federal funding for employment and training programs and focus on innovative initiatives that connect people to meaningful work opportunities.

- **Data and research:** Fund evaluation of outcomes of initiatives and publicly communicate findings, measure food security trends across the state, assess community-level access to food, and identify opportunities for institutions, organizations, and government agencies to partner on research initiatives on food affordability, access, and equity. The USDA's reversal of long-standing commitment to studying food insecurity across the United States will have significant downstream impacts on the state's ability to assess trends in food insecurity and identify opportunities for further investment. Partnerships between philanthropic organizations, academic institutions, and state agencies should seek to mitigate the challenges created by USDA by continuing to measure food insecurity and related outcomes.
- **Build capacity:** Identify and fund opportunities to address capacity and infrastructure challenges of local programs and close gaps in communities where access to food and ability to afford food is greater, including efforts to increase capacity in rural areas, marginalized communities, and services tailored to meet the unique needs of disproportionately impacted people, including, but not limited to, older adults, immigrants, people with disabilities, unhoused individuals, and working families.
- **Health system engagement:** Encourage health care organizations to support access to healthy foods through screening for food insecurity and referring patients to resources, including SNAP, forming partnerships with food access organizations, and investing in community-based food security efforts. To support this work, DTA and MassHealth should work together to assess data on gaps in SNAP enrollment among MassHealth members and collaborate on solutions that seek to assist MassHealth members apply for SNAP as well as access other nutrition resources.
- **Food is Medicine into HealthCare:** Encourage MassHealth to seek Food is Medicine opportunities via appropriate federal authorities. Plan should include evaluation of metrics (e.g., access improvement and cost savings).
- **Business engagement:** Engage businesses and industries, particularly businesses that employ SNAP participants, on addressing systemic barriers to food access and promoting food security, including identifying opportunities to increase wages and ensure minimum hours to promote economic stability among workers.
- **Food donation:** Increase food donations and food rescue efforts and deepen impact of current efforts through education campaigns, expanding infrastructure, and leveraging state-level efforts, such as the Commercial Food Material Disposal Ban.
- **Emergency planning:** Assess lessons learned from the SNAP lapse during the federal shutdown, including strengths, challenges, opportunities, and gaps, to integrate into state response planning for future systemic crises. For acute crises, provide education and resources to first responders on the impact of food insecurity to integrate into emergency response.

Next Steps

While the Governor's Anti-Hunger Task Force has already begun taking steps to address recommendations outlined in this report, the immediate next step will be to release an implementation plan focusing on recommendations with highest impact and ability to be rapidly implemented alongside current efforts the state and members of the Task Force are already taking to address recommendations.

Implementation of recommendations and work of the Task Force will continue to include engaging with impacted communities and experts, including members of the Make Hunger History Coalition, with the goal of continuing to seek opportunities to strengthen equitable access to local, nutritious, culturally-relevant foods and raising awareness of statewide resources in Massachusetts.

Acknowledgements

The Task Force's members (see below), appointed by the Governor, represent diverse government, non-profit, hunger relief organizations, and business interests in the anti-hunger movement. In addition to the members of the Task Force, further individuals and organizations also participated in working groups and feedback sessions. The co-chairs would like to thank everyone who provided their time and expertise in developing these comprehensive recommendations.

Anti-Hunger Task Force Members

Seat Affiliation	Member
Designee of the Secretary of Health and Human Service (EOHHS), and co-chair	Allison Bovell-Ammon
Designee of the Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA), and co-chair	Ashley Randle
Designee of the Secretary of Education (EOE), and co-chair	Alana Davidson
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Appendix & Bibliography

Listening Session Summaries

Southeastern Massachusetts summary (November 17, 2025):

1. We need more HIP vendors and DTA workers. DTA does not have enough staff for their caseload.
2. Farmers need more land in Massachusetts and are interested in tax breaks for farmers donating food.
3. Farmers have had so much produce to give to food pantries over the last few years, but it shouldn't have to be donated. MEFAP is very important.
4. Hunt to Harvest is a great program that should be built upon. We need more meat processing centers in the state and middle of the supply chain companies.
5. During the SNAP freeze, it was had to have a coordinated response. Weekends were the toughest – kids had school meals, grab and go for the evenings. There was no master list of all resources available, though that is a challenge with phone numbers and hours changing. Could a state map in multiple languages help?
6. There needs to be more awareness about how much hunger exists in our communities. Until the SNAP freeze, people did not realize how many people are going without food.
7. Bristol County Agricultural School increased their school breakfast participation by providing hot meals and incorporating more local purchasing through support of MassFresh grants. Interested in working with other school districts on procurement best practices related to local food.
8. A lot of people don't have working kitchens. Explore pathways to get more prepared foods into food pantries, shelters, corner stores – infrastructure is the biggest challenge.

Virtual listening session summary (November 19, 2025):

1. Invest in SNAP Nutrition Education given federal program cut
 - a. Ensure nutrition education is culturally-relevant and available in public locations, such as libraries
2. Communicate effectively in times of crisis
3. Build on existing infrastructure to create robust responses
 - a. Create a centralized database of resources statewide
4. Address challenges created by expanded work requirements by:
 - a. Identifying supports for older adults
 - b. Increasing SNAP outreach to help people claim exemptions when eligible
 - c. Leveraging free community college opportunities
 - d. Engaging philanthropic support to expand access to SNAP Employment and Training opportunities
5. Respond to fear among immigrant communities worried about using benefits
6. Hire more DTA staff to support SNAP enrollment and improve customer service
7. Change EBT card design to reduce stigma
8. Increase access to free breakfast in classrooms across the state
9. Support access to food pantries and other emergency food resources given cuts to SNAP
10. Encourage municipalities to add food security to their sustainability and long-term plans
11. Engage the health care sector in efforts, including
 - a. Encouraging health insurers to adopt coverage of nutrition resources
 - b. Launching food pharmacies at hospitals and clinics
12. Fund Local Food Purchasing Agreement program
13. Convert vacant land into farms and gardens

Western Massachusetts summary (December 9, 2025):

1. Create more opportunities for connecting to local resources
 - a. Create a statewide database of information on local food resources or a food mapping project
 - b. Create an app for neighbors to share produce from gardens and local farms for people in need
 - c. Ensure resources are not all online given technology divides
 - d. Support immigrant access to food through innovative models that promote safety given enforcement fear
 - e. Support young parents to access resources, including WIC
 - f. Highlight regional needs and emphasize that solutions that work in one part of the state may not be best suited for another part of the state
 - g. Increase access to cooking classes
2. Increase coordination and collaboration across organizations
 - a. Utilize lessons learned from COVID to create coalitions and collaboratives for sharing information and targeting local areas of need
 - b. Encourage municipalities and local organizations to coordinate partnerships.
 - c. Incentive funders to prioritize collaborative efforts aimed at increasing system capacity vs funding siloed programs
 - d. Collaborate across faith-based organizations and community-based organizations
3. Expand access to farming, gleaning, and food donations
 - a. Create organized system for connecting people with gleaning opportunities
 - b. Provide education for residents interested in gardening, urban farming, and canning practices
 - c. Support the Lot to Farm bill that will support use of unused land for farming
 - d. Create a tax incentive for food donations from farms and retailers to donate food
 - e. Revitalize vacant farms
 - f. Fund LFPA
4. Improve food access in underserved communities
 - a. Build infrastructure for connecting food to community, particularly in food deserts
 - b. Create long-term strategies for supporting small, independent grocers in low income communities
 - c. Support mobile market models
 - d. Expand weekend access to emergency food resources
 - e. Invest in community-run grocery stores
 - f. Expand online SNAP purchasing program to include small grocery stores
 - g. Support the Hunger Free Campus bill
5. Improve state communications on SNAP changes
 - a. Create a toolkit for organizations supporting residents impacted by changes to SNAP
 - b. Mail DTA recertification notices in a distinct color envelope
 - c. Launch a communications/engagement effort for educating clients on importance of responding to specific notices
 - d. Reduce literacy level of Mass.gov information on SNAP to improve readability for clients
6. Facilitate ongoing community engagement on task force recommendations and work
 - a. Create a community engagement infrastructure through the task force for ongoing engagement
 - b. Connect with grassroots organizations to spread the word and connect with communities
 - c. Enshrine the right to food in the state constitution and build an infrastructure for engaging communities on implementation
 - d. Measure food insecurity by region and statewide on an ongoing basis
7. Consider impacts beyond food in the report
 - a. Emphasize impact of food insecurity on physical and mental health
 - b. Acknowledge increases in housing, energy, transportation, and health costs contribute to food insecurity and addressing high cost of living important for reducing hunger.

Central Massachusetts summary (December 10, 2025):

1. Allocate funding from Fair Share tax to food security efforts
2. Address grocery price inflation
3. Increase opportunities for small organizations to receive funding necessary for long-term sustainability
4. Engage health care organizations for food security initiative funding
5. Share more stories and communicate importance of the human right to food
 - a. Myth bust narratives around who is food insecure and food pantry participants
6. Collaborate with farmers to supply food to pantries and increase opportunities for people to grow food for local food access organizations
7. Engage employers in ensuring people are paid a living wage
8. Identify opportunities and best practices for universal basic income
9. Increase access to healthier foods
10. Create a database to assist individuals and organizations to connect to resources

Northern Massachusetts summary (December 15, 2025):

1. Focus on efforts to “ease the pain” of food insecurity, including through philanthropic and government support
 - a. Utilize the state rainy day for food insecurity relief
 - b. Increase support for food pantries, staffing and infrastructure given increased role charitable food system will need to play in reducing food insecurity
2. Improve Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) by:
 - a. Codifying HIP into law
 - b. Reducing friction in utilizing the benefit
 - c. Educate consumers on how to utilize HIP
 - d. Improve DTA communication to clients about HIP markets, hours, etc
 - e. Provide adequate funding for HIP
 - f. Increase the number of HIP vendors
3. Emphasize dignity of choice and promote efforts that provide access to foods that serve people’s specific dietary needs
4. Address gaps in infrastructure to scale up responses
 - a. Identify opportunities to increase access to trucks, cold storage, etc
 - b. Recruit and retain volunteers and support hiring for volunteer coordinators
 - c. Support shared space models and collaboration across organizations
 - d. Create more food hubs
 - e. Establish partnerships between non-profit organizations and food retailers and manufacturers to improve distribution systems
5. Build system capacity across food security initiatives
6. Support efforts to get food from farms to food access organizations
7. Provide funding for SNAP Education given federal program cut
8. Support access to food during the summer through Summer Eats and SunBucks
9. Update bus routes to support access to food pantries, markets, and SNAP retailer
10. Advocate for federal investment in anti-poverty programs
11. Encourage municipalities to engage partnerships through resource fairs and other initiatives
12. Incentive companies to donate food and support food access efforts
13. Utilize urban land for farms
14. Increase education about food resources through electronic and paper communications
15. Incentive farmers to establish farmers markets in low-income communities
16. Address high food prices



Virtual Listening Session (January 14, 2026):

1. Identify funding to supplement SNAP outreach providers losing federal administrative funding
2. Connect the dots in the supply chain to expand prepared meals and culturally relevant foods
 - a. Leverage food recovery efforts to support access to prepared meals, particularly for older adults, people with disabilities, working families and other populations where scratch cooking is a barrier to healthy eating
3. Address concerns about ICE enforcement at food distribution sites and utilize alternative delivery models
4. Create a state-funded SNAP benefit for immigrants losing eligibility under federal rule changes
5. Work with Councils on Aging and encourage partnerships with senior mobile markets
6. Maximize the Senior Nutrition Program
7. Increase access to gift card distribution
8. Identify opportunities for local organizations supporting clients applying for SNAP to assist educating clients on SNAP rules to reduce error rates
9. Make improvements to HIP to including:
 - a. Expanding access to previously eligible individuals, potentially through distribution of cards similar to Sun Bucks
 - b. Increasing public awareness
10. Integrate food insecurity and SNAP policy changes into crisis response efforts including:
 - a. Providing food resources to first responders to support de-escalation tactics during crises
 - b. Create curriculum for law enforcement and emergency responders on the impact of food insecurity on health, mental health, and other factors impacting crisis response.
11. Address housing costs and other costs of living that impact people's ability to purchase food
12. Address food deserts and lack of access to food in some communities
13. Develop local systems for coordination of supports and resources

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- [SNAP Retailer Management Year End Summary FY 2024 | Food and Nutrition Service](#)
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