

**The Food Security Task Force** (FSTF) was established by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors and charged with making recommendations to the City to improve food security. The task force requested input from members and community stakeholders on: 1) Immediate threats to food security, 2) Food security innovations during the response to COVID19, and 3) Policy recommendations to improve food security. This document summarizes the FSTF recommended response to the unprecedented need for food in San Francisco during this public health and economic crisis.

**Background:** Even prior to COVID19, food security in San Francisco was a pressing and widespread issue. At least 1 in 4 San Franciscans were at risk for food insecurity and its negative impacts including poor health, elevated stress, exacerbation of mental health and other chronic health conditions, and impairment to child development and academic achievement. Previous reports from the FSTF (2018, 2019) highlight San Francisco's residents most vulnerable to food insecurity. The COVID19 pandemic has resulted in a rapid increase in food insecurity in the United States, California, and across San Francisco.

### COVID19 Impact on Food Security and Community Response

Many individuals and families are newly food insecure due to unprecedented unemployment as well as the closure of organizations that previously offered food programs. The widespread impact of COVID19 has required immediate solutions to minimize hunger and support residents to safely shelter in place. Many food programs pivoted their models to support their clients' food and household needs, and innovative models emerged from public agencies, community organizations, and newly formed spontaneous feeding groups. Food providers have been lifelines to the community, and these efforts have played a key role in supporting vulnerable populations to shelter in place and minimize the community transmission of COVID19.

With new variants of COVID19, existing health and racial disparities, and the ongoing economic impact of the pandemic, we must be even more vigilant in sustaining support for vulnerable populations - especially those at highest risk of serious illness and economic devastation from COVID19. These populations include communities experiencing health disparities and structural racism, immigrants who are undocumented, older adults, people with disabilities, and people who are unhoused. People living in congregate settings and in multigenerational households including many children are also of concern, as well as low wage essential workers who have been heavily impacted by COVID19.



Mayor Breed's 2020-21 budget included \$45.8 million to support food security as part of the City's response to COVID19.

This historic investment has been critical, yet the food insecurity crisis in San Francisco will require additional public and private investment. The City's efforts on this front must be ongoing and responsive to changing needs. Food insecurity will not end with vaccination.

The City deployed an unprecedented response to the sudden and enormous increase in food insecurity due to COVID19. Yet, there are still gaps in service that must be met now, and we need a plan to sustain food supports for as long as they are needed. Confronting rising food insecurity in San Francisco also requires ongoing centralized food coordination, ongoing assessment of food needs, and information and referral systems.



**Immediate threats:** Economic uncertainty and heightened racial inequities exacerbate existing food insecurity. Below is a summary of some of the most immediate threats to food security.

#### Economic distress

- Wealth inequality;
- High rates of unemployment;
- Missed work due to remote school and lack of childcare;
- Expiration of enhanced federal unemployment benefits;
- Increasing lack of health insurance for the unemployed;
- High cost of living combined with workers earning above the income threshold for federal nutrition benefits.

#### Community trauma

- Structural racism;
- Violence, trauma, and mental health crisis;
- Increased homelessness;
- Suspension of Muni lines leave gaps in access to food and jobs.

#### Inadequate government support

- Anticipated budget cuts at the federal, state, and local level;
- Lack of ongoing comprehensive federal COVID19 relief package;
- Immigrants are often not eligible for federal benefits;
- Inequitable and erratic federal Farmers to Families Food Box program.

#### Food programs face high-demand, changing service environments and unstable funding

- Limited, short-term, and unstable funding for food programs;
- Closure of schools and childcare increases food insecurity among children and their families;
- Uncertainty about renewal of USDA waivers that have allowed SFUSD and DCYF to serve all children in San Francisco for free;
- Food service providers required to address holistic community needs in addition to food (mental health, etc.);
- Increased operating costs due to COVID19 (food, staff, facility, packaging, distribution, etc.);
- Loss of congregate dining and anticipated loss of some pop-up pantries;
- Volunteer and staffing shortages, and increasing rates of staff and volunteer burnout;
- Limited and underutilized public space for urban agriculture.







**Sustain Innovations:** Of utmost importance is to proactively plan to fill the gaps that will be left after the expected roll back of emergency food supports. In the immediate response to COVID19, innovations helped mitigate widespread hunger and should be sustained and scaled to meet the ongoing need.

Listed below are examples of some of those innovative changes.

#### Resources (ability to purchase food)

- Direct cash benefits;
- Gift cards;
- Grocery and restaurant vouchers, Market Match;
- Rapid enrollment for CalFresh/SNAP and WIC through administrative waivers;
- Pandemic EBT.

#### Access (ability to obtain food safely and conveniently)

- Food support for the entire household;
- Culturally and religiously appropriate food;
- Higher quality food;
- Increased access points to pick up free groceries and meals;
- Increased home delivery of meals and groceries;
- Meals and water for unsheltered residents delivered to encampments;
- Food for households isolating and quarantining;
- Meals for medically vulnerable people without kitchens living in SROs;
- Household needs such as personal protective equipment, cleaning supplies, baby formula, diapers, adult incontinence supplies.

#### Consumption (ability to prepare and store food)

- Programs that provided a hybrid of groceries and prepared meals to meet food needs over time;
- Localized, high quality, and culturally appropriate food from neighborhood groups, stores, and restaurants;
- Reduced frequency of delivery and pickup of food to eliminate unnecessary physical contact;
- Updated equipment and storage for pantries and distribution centers.





**Recommendations:** A sustained commitment, by all levels of government, to end systemic racism and address structural barriers to health, including food insecurity.

### Local

- Maintain and expand city investments in food through a health equity framework;
- Ensure food delivered to all communities is high quality and appropriate to cultural and religious needs;
- Food programs should provide for the food needs of the entire household including unsheltered populations;
- Ensure continued funding for programs serving families with children;
- Housing providers should coordinate with food providers;
- Target economic stimulus recovery through direct cash support, jobs, and business development, with a focus on food for vulnerable communities and provided by businesses owned by communities most impacted by COVID19;
- Funders and city contracts should be flexible to allow grantees to reallocate funds to respond to needs;
- Maintain and improve integrated food referral and resource list through 311 and city website;
- Expand localized solutions such as neighborhood task forces and resource hubs;
- Increase utilization of outdoor public spaces for food distribution and urban agriculture;
- Conduct a consistent and ongoing food security assessment and implementation plan with regular public updates to the Board of Supervisors and Mayor.

### State

- Support state efforts to end child hunger through increased funding for:
  - Universal School Meals where federal rules would otherwise make such programs unachievable or unsustainable;
  - Compensation for the increased cost of food and foodservice for providers operating the CACFP program during the pandemic and during the recovery;
- Support state legislative efforts to expand immigrant access to food through state-funded food benefit programs;
- Support state legislative efforts to reduce administrative burden for CalFresh application and recertification process;
- Support efforts to include medically supportive food and nutrition services as covered benefits under Medi-Cal.

### Federal

- Advocate for the extension of the 15 percent SNAP benefit boost for all recipients for the duration of the economic downturn to stimulate the economy while addressing increased need and higher grocery prices;
- Advocate for the extension of enhanced unemployment benefits and additional direct cash payments;
- Extend and expand Pandemic-EBT through the summer and for future school closings when children would miss school meals.