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POLICY

[Policy Guide](#)[Reports](#)[Speeches](#)[Legislative Initiatives](#)

Reports

Food for Thought **How the Food Industry Can Help End Hunger in NYC**

Introduction

Despite the perception that New York City is a place of Broadway shows and fancy restaurants, for a huge and growing number of people, New York is a city of hunger. There are over 1,000 soup kitchens and food pantries in New York City, serving up to 1.5 million city residents. The local food industry, donors, and volunteers work with two major anti-hunger organizations to distribute excess food to privately run community food programs throughout the City's five boroughs.

Although community support helps stock shelves with freshly prepared foods, produce, and canned goods, half of all programs report that they ration portions or turn people away because they run out of food or other resources, like storage space and staff, before they run out of clients.

Community food programs provide an important and immediate source of food and in large part depend on the generosity of New Yorkers. Over 80% of New York's food programs receive food and funding from private sources. According to the NYC Coalition Against Hunger, which represents the programs, over three quarters of pantries and kitchens expect the need for food to increase in the next six months.

While a variety of solutions are necessary to end hunger, such as increasing access to food stamps, strengthening the quality of public education, and promoting a living wage, it is also essential to ensure that New Yorkers can simply get a meal when they are hungry. No parent should have to choose between feeding their children and paying the rent.

The Public Advocate is calling on the entire local food industry—including manufacturers, supermarkets, retailers, farmers' markets, restaurants, cafes, and delis—to help reduce hunger in New York City by donating excess food to organizations who will deliver it to people in need.

Background: Hunger on the Rise

Nationally, about four million families went hungry at some point in 2002, and about 12 million—or about 11% of all U.S. families—experienced times of limited or uncertain availability of food, or 'food insecurity,' according to a report released recently by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Food-insecure households tend to reduce the quality or variety of their diets, or they may resort to making use of emergency food sources.

These rates of hunger and food insecurity have been increasing steadily over the last three years—up 8.6 percent from 2001 and 13 percent from 2000—according to the authors of the report. Hunger, they say, corresponds with rising levels of poverty.

In New York City, increasing poverty rates and the rise in unemployment has meant even more individuals and families struggle to buy food. A recent survey of New York City food programs find that demand for food increased by 46% over the past three years and by 26% in 2003.

In the City, up to one out of five people and one out of four children turn to food pantries and kitchens, double the national rates. One-third of City seniors also turn to private food resources. Sadly, this trend is increasing and programs are running out of resources to feed all who are hungry.

The need for food in New York City is understandable because the concentration of poverty in the City is higher than in the state. With only about 43 percent of the state population, we represent almost 60 percent of the state's households below the poverty level, according to the 2000 U.S. Census. This is even more distressing when one considers the much higher cost of living in New York City and the fact that the poverty level itself does not take into account cost of living.

Company Donations

While individual donors are crucial to the food-donation network, manufacturers, distributors, wholesalers, retailers, restaurants, and other food outlets donate surplus food on a regular basis to not-for-profit organizations that pick it up and distribute it to emergency programs.

Many food establishments, despite how well they plan, have extra food. This is due to the nature of serving diverse customer needs with perishable resources in an unpredictable environment. Variables include market excess, consumer choice, unsold inventory, and damage to packaging. The food these establishments donate is not plate waste but edible food never before offered to a consumer.

There are between 20,000 and 22,000 commercial food outlets in New York City. According to City Harvest and the Food Bank For New York City, the two largest organizations that receive and distribute food donations in New York City, about 3,000 food outlets supply donations. While this level of participation is extraordinary, these numbers indicate that between 83 and 85 percent of food outlets are not donating surplus food.

All of the 21 million pounds of food City Harvest received in their 2003 fiscal year was contributed by private sources. Manufacturers and wholesalers donated nearly 40%. City Harvest receives support from 3,000 food establishments in all, including D-Agostino Supermarkets, Pret A Manger, Starbucks, Le Bernardin, and Tribeca Grill. Farmers who participate at local farmers' markets, overseen by the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, are also an important contributor to City Harvest. The Food Bank For New York City received about 4 million pounds of food from about fifty private donors (57 million additional pounds come from government sources).

Their contributors include the New York City Meat Market, Fulton Fish Market, Hunts Point Produce Market, Hebrew National, Stella D'oro, Freihofer's and Gristedes.

The Collection and Distribution Network

City Harvest and the Food Bank For New York City each have their own methods of meeting the needs of hungry New Yorkers, and both are enormously successful in their missions. Both are not-for-profit organizations.

City Harvest, the world's first and New York 's only food rescue organization, operates a fleet of 15 refrigerated trucks 365 days a year. They pick up food from donors and deliver it directly to over 800 community food programs that help feed over 200,000 hungry New Yorkers each week. Their operation makes use of donor generosity from all segments of the food industry. By rescuing food and distributing it the same day, City Harvest minimizes storage costs and ensures freshness.

The Food Bank For New York City, formerly known as Food For Survival, owns a 100,000 square-foot warehouse facility that includes a cooler and freezer for perishable goods. As the largest food bank in the country, the organization packages regular shipments of food received largely from the City's Emergency Food Assistance Program as well as private donors, to more than 1,000 community food providers. Their efforts provide enough for over 200,000 meals, served each day by more than 1,000 community food programs.

These organizations, through food rescue and food banking, provide a great service to New York 's low-income households by connecting community food programs with businesses that have surplus food. For more information on how to donate contact City Harvest at 917-351-8700 or www.cityharvest.org , or Food Bank For New York City at 718-991-4300 or www.foodbanknyc.org .

What Are the Benefits of Donating?

Besides the satisfaction that comes from contributing, there are cost benefits for food donors:

- **Tax Benefits:** Federal tax law permits regular corporations to deduct cost of production plus one half fair market value, not to exceed twice cost. A bill currently under consideration by Congress would expand this incentive to all business taxpayers.
- **Financial Savings:** Organizations like City Harvest and the Food Bank For New York City pick up for free, eliminating removal costs of surplus food.
- **Company Profile:** Both the Food Bank For New York City and City Harvest promote their donors through publications and other media.
- **The Environment :** Much-needed food is consumed rather than sent to land fills.
- **Employee Morale:** Employees are proud to be associated with a company that contributes to the community.

Legal Protection

Donors are protected from liability by New York State law for food that has been reasonably inspected and donated in good faith. Federal law also protects donors from civil or criminal repercussions.

The Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Act of 1996 amended the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 to:

“ encourage the donation of food and groceries to nonprofit charitable agencies by minimizing the risks of legal actions against donors and distributors of foods. ...[It excludes] from civil or criminal liability a person or nonprofit food organization that, in good faith, donates or distributes donated foods for food relief..”

Conclusion and Findings

Hunger is on the rise in New York City and across the nation, and food-insecure or hungry households turn to food pantries and soup kitchens in times of need. While New York City has a proud record of giving and a great infrastructure for distributing donations, only around 15 percent of food outlets in the City donate surplus food. This potential resource goes largely untapped. Instead of letting safe surplus food get thrown away as trash, the Public Advocate urges all food outlets to explore how they can help end hunger by donating to City Harvest, Food Bank for New York City , or other reputable food programs. The food industry can cut costs while making a difference at the same time.

New York City Coalition Against Hunger, “No Recovery for the Hungry: Skyrocketing Demand and Decreasing Resources Force New York City Pantries and Kitchens to Close or Ration Food,” November 2003.

Food Bank For New York City/America’s Second Harvest, “Hunger in America 2001: The New York City Report,” November 2001.

New York City Coalition Against Hunger, “No Recovery for the Hungry,” November 2003.

About the same number currently receive government support from sources such as the city-funded Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP).

Mark Nord, Margaret Andrews, and Steve Carlson Household Food Security in the United States , 2002 ; U.S. Department of Agriculture.

U.S. Census, “Poverty in the United States : 2002,” September 2003.

New York City Coalition Against Hunger, “No Recovery for the Hungry,” November 2003.

Food Bank for New York City/America’s Second Harvest, “Hunger in America 2000: The New York City Report” November 2001; Bureau of the U.S. Census, U.S. Census 2000.

These numbers are based on various estimates and figures arrived at through conversations with the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, which oversees licensing of food

establishments, the U.S. Bureau of Census County Business Patterns 2001 report, and the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets.

City Harvest, 2002 Annual Report.

Senate Bill 476, the Charity, Aid, Recovery and Empowerment Act of 2003 (CARE Act)

Disposal costs in New York City per ton are \$105. Mayor's Management Report, Fiscal Year 2003, City of New York .

In 1995, over 96 billion pounds of edible food, or 27 percent of food produced in America , was thrown out. Estimating and Addressing America's Food Losses, Kantor, Lipton, Manchester, and Oliveira, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, 1997.

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[Back to top](#)

The Public Advocate's Office • 1 Centre Street, 15th Floor • New York, NY 10007 • **General Inquiries:** (212) 669-4091
Ombudsman Services: (212) 669-7250 • Fax: (212) 669-4091