

**Testimony of Kate MacKenzie, Executive Director**  
**Mayor's Office of Food Policy**  
**Before the New York City Council Committee on Contracts, Economic Development, &**  
**Oversight and Investigations**  
**June 27, 2022**

**Good Food Purchasing Program**

Good morning, Chair Farias, Chair Won, and Chair Brewer and members of the Economic Development, Contracts and Oversight and Investigations Committees. My name is Kate MacKenzie, and I am the Executive Director of the Mayor's Office of Food Policy (MOFP). Joining me today are my colleagues from Mayor's Office of Contract Services (MOCS) and Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS).

Thank you for inviting me here today to talk about our Good Food Purchasing Program. In 2017, the City began exploring the National Good Food Purchasing Program, a program created by the Center for Good Food Purchasing ("the Center"). That program sets specific standards around five values areas: nutrition, local economies, animal welfare, valued and fair workforce, and environmental sustainability. As one of the country's largest institutional food purchasers, second only to the military, it makes sense to align our purchases with the Administration's priorities and values.

The City sought to learn more about where our food comes from and how it is produced so it could make more informed choices -- for example, about ways to increase participation of New York State and Minority- and Women- Owned Business Enterprises (M/WBE) vendors. Health + Hospitals (H+H) was the first City affiliated entity to engage with the Center followed by the Department of Education (DOE). These entities shared their available procurement data with the Center for Good Food Purchasing for analysis.

In 2019, when I assumed this position, additional City agencies were included into this work: the Administration for Children's Services, the Department of Correction, the Department for Homeless Services, and the Human Resources Administration. The Department for the Aging also began collecting data, but as its food procurement are conducted via sub-contractors and Human Service Contracts, this proved especially challenging. Each agency began the process of asking its vendors for detailed information about the food they provide to the City. While one might think that getting information about the origin and methods of production of the food, we purchase would be straightforward, it is not -- especially because vendors had no requirement to report this information to the City.

Since the establishment of nutrition standards by the City in 2008, the City has required vendor adherence to those standards. Vendors have become accustomed to sharing comprehensive nutritional information with the City at the time of contract award, and throughout the duration of the contract. Our efforts to obtain this detailed information about where the food was coming from were extensive yet did not yield complete results. The City of New York is not unique in that way, for the entire U.S. food system is complex and opaque. It is unfortunately the norm, and something that the City is on a path to shifting.

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In addition to expanding the number of agencies that participated in data collection, MOFP began convening monthly meetings with agencies in November 2019. The purpose of these meetings was to build understanding and awareness of the Good Food Purchasing values and how agencies could support them with their food purchases. At the same time, we also began regularly meeting with the Law Department to build support for the work. With DCAS, we hosted a vendor expo to highlight opportunities for working with M/WBE businesses. MOFP secured philanthropic dollars that resulted in a formal contract with the Center for Good Food Purchasing to do the agency assessments and the overall vendor analysis. We also contracted with Karen Karp & Partners (KK&P) to support agencies and develop agency action plans.

And, in March of 2020, most City programs paused their meal programs as we knew them as a result of the pandemic. In February 2021, the City released its first ever 10-year food policy plan, Food Forward NYC, pursuant to Local Law 40 of 2020, which included knowledge learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and incorporated an integrated approach to the Good Food Purchasing Program. The Food Forward NYC report demonstrated the role of Good Food Purchasing in addressing five goals outlined in that report. MOFP also created a specific City-wide Good Food Purchasing strategy and resumed our efforts with City agencies with a renewed energy and very real food supply chain experiences. MOFP committed to unprecedented transparency, and in September of 2021, this information was shared on our website. To our knowledge, no other City has shared this level of information.

We also released raw data on our food purchases, including prices, to the extent legally possible, and intend to continue doing so on an annual basis. From the extensive engagement the City has conducted with stakeholders across the food system, we learned that a major barrier to the participation of small vendors is the lack of understanding that institutional food contracts look very different from individual food service. So, we shared this information to enable small food vendors to understand what institutional demand looks like: the type of foods needed, and the amount of each food type.

Further, in October 2021, New York City became the first U.S. city to sign the Cool Food Pledge, in which signatories seek to collectively reduce the climate impact of food served by 25% by 2030. Sharing this information aims to help food purchasers, consumers, advocates, and the public more broadly understand the impact of food choices and to encourage the purchase of more climate-friendly food options. As part of signing onto this Pledge, the City provided with definitive metrics and objective data on our food-related carbon emissions.

In February 2022, Mayor Adams formalized the City's commitment to Good Food Purchasing by issuing Executive Order 8, "Commitment to Health and Nutrition: Food Standards and Good Food Purchasing." This Executive Order directs all agencies that procure and serve food to participate in Good Food Purchasing and emphasizes data collection and transparency as the backbone of the program's implementation.

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In April of this year, MOFP launched the City's first interactive food and climate dashboard, which includes information regarding the carbon footprint of the City's food purchases. The dashboard was developed with input from key stakeholders, and it utilizes food purchase data from Fiscal Year 2019. This dashboard will be updated annually.

Throughout this journey, MOFP has learned many things.

First, nearly every agency procures food differently. The types of food, the length of the contract, and the type of contract vary depending on the scope and services needed. Many City agencies adhere to Federal and State grant requirements that restrict what they can purchase. The recipients of food range from young kids to older adults, and serving sizes also vary. In some cases, we buy specific commodities -- like apples -- and in other cases, we buy complete and prepared meals. Every agency procures and serves food differently, so we need to tailor the approach to their needs. This is reflected in the drafting and execution of their contracts and in working with the agency staff who are responsible for developing menus based on the food that is procured pursuant to those contracts. Simply stated, it's not a "one-size fits- all" program. Contracts average about three years, which affects the cadence with which any policy changes is reflected in the text of active contracts. Food contracts alone do not provide many opportunities to affect timely change. We are also mapping the process of solicitation development and implementation for each agency in order to create robust interagency support and accountability. This is vital for timely action on contracting and data collection.

Second, robust and complete data from vendors is essential. This is why Executive Order 8 is so important. For each new food contract direct with vendors, we can require our data template to be completed annually.

We have an informed understanding of the complex and overlapping state and federal legal frameworks that govern the City's purchasing of food. We are committed to pursuing a food purchasing program that is bold and impactful, but any program that the City pursues must be aligned with state and federal law.

We know that agency staff want to advance this initiative. They want to learn and exchange ideas. And we need programmatic opportunities in addition to contractual opportunities for them to do so. City agency staff are the front line of this work. Whether it is nutritionists, program managers, operational staff, chefs, or procurement staff, they are doing the vast majority of the work to implement the program. They also are those coordinating annual data collection from food vendors and holding them accountable to our data collection standards. As we develop and set new performance metrics connected to the five value areas, they will be in charge of working with support from MOFP and their agency towards those goals. They also have the responsibility of promoting inter-agency communications, including sharing best practices, innovative ideas and challenges common to other agencies.

We are ensuring the City's Good Food Purchasing initiative has the greatest possible impact by

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aligning its performance measure framework with other Citywide initiatives. We are also designing a program that works for New Yorkers, which means making sure what we do is understandable to the public. This will promote greater transparency in government but is also critical to another goal of the administration – removing barriers to public engagement in government decision making.

The public-facing dashboard is an important initial step in this process. Through this dashboard, everyone has the opportunity to learn what we buy as a city, and on an agency-by-agency basis.

To achieve faster rates of improvement, we are looking for opportunities for change within existing contracts, such as menu changes, in addition to contractual changes. The Mayor's Office of Food Policy is working with Public Work Partners, a local consulting firm, on identifying opportunities to make it easier for small food vendors, particularly New York State and M/WBE vendors, to do business with the City. My colleagues at the Mayor's Office of Contract Services have also made it a priority to streamline the procurement process and make it simpler for vendors to do business with the City. In partnership with the City Council, they are focused on cutting red tape, bringing visibility for all parties, and updating the regulatory framework to match the new, digital system for procurement.

The Mayor's Office of Food Policy is committed to the success of this work. We will continue to work with the Law Department and agency procurement officers to develop policy pathways for Good Food Purchasing implementation. We will continually develop strategies to support implementation such as the use of data templates, product catalogs, obtaining guidance on solicitations, and helping to connect potential vendors and agencies. We will also work to develop accountability mechanisms by developing performance metrics around process and data completion as well as of course specific program goals. And, as I have stated a number of times, sharing all information we obtain and learn is a priority.

Good Food Purchasing is essential for achieving Mayor Adams' food policy goals for more nutritious, delicious, and plant-powered options. All New Yorkers deserve to know where their food comes from, and we are committed to using the power of procurement to impact our city's and our planet's health. We look forward to continuing to work closely with City Council, the New York Good Food Purchasing Coalition, advocates, businesses, and New York City residents on the implementation of this program.