

Office of the Mayor Health and Human Services

Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity | December 2021



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COVID Food Response

Agency: **Mayor's Office of Food Policy (MOFP), Department of Sanitation (DSNY), Human Resources Administration (HRA), Department of Education (DOE)**

Context

The COVID-19 crisis posed serious challenges to New York City's food distribution channels - how food gets into the City, how it moves around the City, and how it gets into the hands of New Yorkers. An interagency "Food Czar Team" was assembled to confront these challenges. The team involved staff from the MOFP, the Department of Sanitation (DSNY), New York City Emergency Management (NYCEM), the New York City Department of Economic Development (EDC), the New York City Department of Transportation (DOT), the New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission (TLC), and many others. This team focused on two distinct problems: 1) the need to combat food insecurity caused by the pandemic, and 2) the need to secure and protect the City's food supply chain.

Response

With the onset of “New York State on Pause” Executive Order on March 22, 2020, all non-essential businesses statewide including, restaurants, were ordered to close. The Mayor made it clear that no New Yorker should experience hunger as a result of the pandemic. On April 15, 2020, Mayor de Blasio and the Food Czar team released the [Feeding New York](#) report, outlining the programs put in place to meet the needs of food insecure New Yorkers. Major tenets of the plan included a \$25M investment in the City’s pantry system, the establishment of a \$50 million emergency food reserve, and the creation of the COVID Food Response drawing from a mix of federal funding sources. The COVID Food Response included the Department of Education (DOE) Grab & Go Meal program, the Emergency Food Home-Delivered Meal (EFD) program, and increased support for pantries and other emergency food distribution efforts.

DOE Grab & Go Meals

When NYC schools shut down in March 2020, DOE quickly pivoted to offering “grab and go” meals. These free meals, which were available at over 500 school sites across the City, were provided to any New Yorker who asked for one, including adults, with no questions asked.

Emergency Food Home Delivery (EFD)

For New Yorkers who could not go out, had no one to go out for them, and could not afford private delivery options, the City created the EFD program, commonly known as GetFood NYC. This program delivered food directly to New Yorkers in their homes. People who needed it could enroll through 311, an online portal, or an Authorized Enroller Dashboard, which allowed community-based organizations to order meals for clients they already had trusted relationships with, as well as manage recurring orders and update individuals’ account information as needed.

Pandemic Emergency Food Reserve

At the start of the pandemic, the City closely monitored the food supply chain. As a precautionary measure, the Mayor called for the creation of a \$50 million emergency food stockpile or “food reserve” to provide immediate access to sufficient, nutritious food supply to support emergency feeding operations resulting from the COVID-19 response in the event of supply chain disruptions, extreme increases in demand, or another emergency event.

Fortunately, substantial supply chain disruptions never materialized, however, food insecurity rates continued to grow. In August 2020, the Administration made the decision to transition this stockpile into a new program, the Pandemic Food Reserve Emergency Distribution Program, also known as P-FRED. This program provides direct food resources to hundreds of pantries and community organizations across the City that continue to experience high demand as a result of COVID.

The most distinct feature of this program is that for the first time, the City began offering fresh, high-quality produce. Other essential program elements include recipient organizations selecting

the produce that they want, when they want it, and serving both long-standing food pantries and new operations stood up as a result of the pandemic.

Results

- **Grab & Go:** Between March 2020 and September 10, 2021, over 107 million meals were distributed to children and adults across New York City. With the return of full-time learning in school on September 13, 2021, the DOE returned to in-school food service and the Grab & Go program concluded.
- **EFD:** Between March 2020 and October 2021, nearly 129 million meals were distributed through EFD.
- **P-FRED:** Between the program's launch in September 2020 and November 6, 2021, over 13.6 million pounds of fresh produce and nearly 9 million pounds of shelf-stable food were distributed to over 400 emergency food providers across the City.
- **Investments in the City's Emergency Food Network:**
 - The City provided \$900,000 in equipment grants to over 120 food providers to increase pantry capacity
 - The City provided \$600,000 to fund technology upgrades for the emergency food network

Beneficiary Stories

“Together, Met Council and GetFood NYC helped enroll clients from 36 zip codes representing all five boroughs. All the while, our food program continued to serve over 350 food pantries in every neighborhood across NYC with more than 15 million pounds of food.”

“As the pandemic bore down on New York, Met Council was honored to partner with New York City in delivering on the mayor’s promise that no New Yorker go hungry. As a certified enroller and provider of kosher food boxes to the GetFood program, Met Council’s COVID hotline fielded over 33,000 calls and enrolled nearly 5,000 homebound, elderly and struggling people otherwise unable to secure access to desperately needed food in the program. Together, Met Council and GetFood NYC helped enroll clients from 36 zip codes representing all five boroughs. All the while, our food program continued to serve over 350 food pantries in every neighborhood across NYC with more than 15 million pounds of food. We are extraordinarily proud to have been partners in this life saving initiative to ensure a vital, strong safety net for all.” - **David G. Greenfield, CEO, Met Council (GetFood Authorized Enroller)**

The Great Performances (GetFood food vendor)

As the Coronavirus began to shutter the City, we began to retool the kitchen for the unexpected. Within days, we started to produce and deliver the first of 40,000 weekly meals for the Department for the Aging (DFTA) to housebound elderly no longer able to go to their local senior center for meals and company. In times of emergency, we are feeding the most vulnerable New Yorkers and keeping our family at work.

The term is “to pivot.”

In mid-March 2020, the Mayor’s Office for Food Policy and Office of Emergency Management (OEM) reached out to the private sector for support in responding to the unprecedented demand for packaged meals.

Each day brings more messages of need in ways we never envisioned; we are hired to fulfill requests to send meals to heroic and overworked hospital staff, day care centers, beleaguered pantries and community centers serving communities facing unprecedented need.

In response to the staggering overload at our hospitals, Great Performances along with the Sylvia Center have created a meal program to provide fresh and healthy meals to healthcare workers. Like all departments at these hospitals, the food service departments are overloaded and welcome organized donations of fresh and delicious meals.

We are all looking for ways to help our City fight back and be resilient. Good food is our weapon in this fight which will fuel the nurses, doctors and critical staff.

In our Bronx neighborhood, we are working with two local community groups to donate meals for families and seniors. In conjunction with State Assemblywoman Nathalia Fernandez of the 80th District, we are supporting food delivery efforts in three NYCHA community buildings. Additionally, we are committing 100 boxed meals daily to our South Bronx community partners led by York Studios.

We look forward to returning to our lives as caterers for galas and crowded celebrations one day. But we remain hospitality professionals regardless of the meal we are serving – leading with care and respect, knowing that every meal is meaningful, most especially now.

The Common Market (GetFoodNYC food vendor)

In April 2020, The [Common Market Mid-Atlantic](#), a nonprofit aggregator and distributor of regionally grown foods, formed a partnership with the City of New York to deliver boxed food as part of their GetFood NYC COVID-19 Emergency Food Distribution program, an effort to provide nourishment to sheltered-in-place New Yorkers.

Each box contained 4-5 fresh fruits and vegetables, 1 loaf of bread, 1lb. of dried NY black beans, and 1 6 oz. piece of cheese—all sourced from the nonprofit's network of local family farmers, many of whom had lost their traditional wholesale outlets due to the pandemic.

The nonprofit delivered upwards of 13,000 boxes per week to the City, totaling 215,340 boxes over the full delivery period, from April 2020 to October 2020, representing 1.94 million meals.

"This program has been a success on many levels," shared Nolan Masser of Red Hill Farm — 500 acres of Pennsylvania farmland, located in Pitman, PA.

"Most of our potatoes are grown to make fresh-cut fries at restaurants and events. In March, that business disappeared. The food box programs allowed our potatoes to provide nutritious meals for those in need instead of going to waste. As a result, we were able to continue our operations and keep employees working who would have otherwise been laid off."

Weekly drops to Queens and Brooklyn were greeted by members of the National Guard, who helped break down pallets and load food boxes into City taxis and limos, prepared to deliver the free food to people's homes. In Manhattan, drive-through tents were prepped for in-person distribution.

To learn more about The Common Market and their food box program, visit [here](#).

Next Steps

COVID Food Response is currently transitioning to recovery food programs.

Additional Metrics

GetFood Historical Data:

<https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dsny/contact/services/COVID-19GetFoodNYCHistDist.shtml>

Relevant Publications

Feeding New York Plan:

<https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/home/downloads/pdf/reports/2020/Feeding-New-York.pdf>

New Articles:

- **What to Know About NYC's \$170M Grocery and Food Plan During the Coronavirus Crisis** (Eater NY, Apr 2020)
<https://ny.eater.com/2020/4/15/21222448/nyc-food-plan-coronavirus-19-delivery-grocery-restaurants>
- **New York City Serves Up Food to Fill in the Gaps Amid the Pandemic** (The Wall Street Journal, June 2020)
<https://www.wsj.com/articles/new-york-city-serves-up-food-to-fill-in-the-gaps-amid-the-pandemic-11591106402>

- **City distributes 200 million meals through GetFoodNYC emergency programs.** (Amsterdam News, Feb. 2021)
<http://amsterdamnews.com/news/2021/feb/18/city-distributes-200-million-meals-through-getfood/>
- **Food-Insecure New Yorkers Seek More Meal Deliveries From City** (Brooklyn Daily Eagle, Jan. 2021)
<https://brooklyneagle.com/articles/2021/01/15/food-insecure-new-yorkers-seek-more-meal-deliveries-from-city/>
- **What New York City Schools Learned Feeding Millions During the Pandemic** (Civil Eats, Mar 2021)
<https://civileats.com/2021/03/18/what-new-york-city-schools-learned-feeding-millions-during-the-pandemic/>
- (Gothamist, July 2021)
<https://gothamist.com/news/city-continues-free-meals-distribution-all-new-yorkers-through-summer>
- **DOE offering grab-and-go meals at 400 sites this summer.** (AMNY, July 2021)
<https://www.amny.com/news/doe-offering-grab-and-go-meals-at-400-sites-this-summer/>
- **NYC launches free grab-and-go summer meals program: Here are the Staten Island hubs.** (SI Live, July 2021)
<https://www.silive.com/coronavirus/2021/07/nyc-launches-free-grab-and-go-summer-meals-program-here-are-the-staten-island-hubs.html>