



# BASIC NEEDS

## FOOD

**500%** increase in US obesity rate since 1950

**4M** fewer farms exist now than in 1950 (from 6 million to 2 million)

**95%** decline in US agricultural workforce since 1950

**THE MID-20TH CENTURY WAS A TURNING POINT** in the American food system, ushering in a precipitous decline in farm populations. With the shift toward highly consolidated, vertically integrated, and industrially efficient agriculture came a rise in obesity, a loss of agricultural biodiversity, and a rise in nitrate pollution and greenhouse gas emissions due to concentrated methods of farming and animal rearing.

COVID-19 has highlighted that farmers and small businesses have precarious livelihoods that are threatened by even a short-term loss of revenue. The shutdown of the food service pipelines on which their businesses are built left many farmers and food processors dangling, imperiling their livelihoods. And yet, while the farmers and food processors were desperate to find markets for their supply, food banks were stretched beyond capacity, with not enough food to meet the dramatically sudden increase in demand.

*Facts adapted from the Basic Needs: Food Deep Dive*

### KEY ISSUES

- **The higher rates of mortality in Communities of Color** can be attributed, at least in part, to the greater incidence of chronic diseases— diabetes, hypertension, obesity—that are closely linked to nutrition.
- **Low-income communities have limited access** to affordable, nutritious food, relying instead on cheap processed foods that are high in calories but low in nutrient density.
- **Although school districts nimbly met the challenge** by diverting their cafeteria food programs to emergency meal delivery at pick-up locations, they did so at great sacrifice to their budgets.
- **The lack of safe working conditions** has left food system workers, who are 1/6 of the nation's workforce, highly vulnerable to contracting COVID-19.
- **Fifty plants produce 98% of the meat** in the United States. With six multinational companies in control of global meat production, the supply chain is efficient but not resilient.
- **With financial and policy support** from their national and state governments, cities can lead the way toward a regionally resilient food system that supports their local as well as neighboring rural economies.
- **The financial value of the long-term**, high-volume contracts of schools and other large institutions is a de-risking opportunity for the supply chain, which allows for price adjustments according to that economy of mid-scale.

# PIVOTAL MOVES

A SELECTION OF IDEAS FOR CHANGING COURSE

## LEVERAGE THE POWER OF PUBLIC CONTRACTING

Cities and counties should adopt purchasing targets for all their large food service institutions that align purchases with a commitment to local economic support, fair wages, safe working conditions, healthy people, and a healthy environment.

The targets of cities, counties, and institutions should then be aggregated into regional targets. These combined dollars can drive entrepreneurial responsiveness to community needs and make a difference in the regional food economy.

Targets should be backed up with contractual commitments to producers and distributors, and progress toward targets should be shared in publicly presented progress reports.

Nationally networked city procurement goals could be leveraged to influence the federal role in funding aspects of the food system.

Goals supporting local economies, sustainable production practices, fair labor practices, nutritional health, and societal equity should be targeted and implemented with equivalent priority.



**The Good Food Purchasing Program** was adopted by the City of Los Angeles and Los Angeles Unified School District in 2012. Its mission is to harness the purchasing power of large institutions to drive changes in the food supply chain. It accomplishes that goal in part through a metric-based feedback and rating tool that is used by the enrolled institutions, with the goal of supporting local economies, fair labor, environmental sustainability, animal welfare, and public health. Now a national body, the Center for Good Food Purchasing is present in 20 cities and over 45 municipal institutions.

### COORDINATE FOR REGIONAL CHANGE

Dedicate a permanent stream of government funding for value-chain innovation among regional suppliers to create shorter, more resilient supply chains.

Promote the development of food hubs that operate as intermediaries between public institutions, neighborhood markets, community serving organizations, and local small- to mid-sized farmers and food businesses.

Use bond measures and other public finance mechanisms to fund food-focused capital projects, such as modern warehouses and logistics networks or incubator-style experimental kitchens.

Invest in the knowledge and tools to support a resilient ecosystem of food production and distribution, integrating sectors across an entire region.

### ACCOUNT FOR FOOD'S TRUE COST

Begin to reverse the economic dynamics that incentivize the production of unhealthy and environmentally destructive food. This can be done by accelerating the implementation of True Cost Accounting in Food, which integrates cost-benefit analysis, life-cycle assessment, and multi-criteria analyses to capture the systemwide impact of food production.

Use the information from True Cost Accounting to set policies that address affordability by adjusting prices to reflect full societal cost (e.g., reflecting the additional cost of producing a strawberry in a manner that doesn't harm the environment or workers).

Implement programs that match nutrition assistance benefits dollar for dollar when used for purchasing fruits or vegetables at a farmers market or similar venue.

### CONNECTIONS

#### THRIVING NATURAL WORLD

A 2017 study of 67 countries placed the United States in the bottom half in terms of nutrition, sustainable agriculture, and food waste. We must develop sustainable food systems that are inclusive, resilient, safe, and diverse. This means providing healthy and affordable food, minimizing waste, and conserving biodiversity—all while adapting to and mitigating the impacts of climate change.

#### MEANINGFUL WORK & WEALTH

The food system is an essential service, and it is imperative that we manage it in a way that is sustainable for the planet and people. By advancing community health, serving workers, and supporting local businesses, we can build a regionally oriented food system that is more balanced and resilient.

#### PATH TO RENEWAL

American consumers spend an estimated \$1 trillion a year on food. We must advance the development of a supply-chain infrastructure that includes food hubs and leadership from local government. It is important to include the workforce and teams focused on economic development, recognizing that the food system is an economic one that responds to financial incentives and investments.

ADAPTED FROM THE [BASIC NEEDS: FOOD](#) DEEP DIVE

**The Health, Environment, Agriculture, Labor (HEAL) Alliance** brings together rural and urban farmers, fisherfolk, farm workers, food-chain workers, rural and urban communities, scientists, public health advocates, environmentalists, and Indigenous groups. Its platform integrates a set of critical food goals:

### **Economy**

- Dignity for food workers
- Opportunity for all producers
- Fair and competitive markets
- Resilient regional economies

### **Health**

- Curb junk-food marketing
- Increase knowledge of, connection to, and transparency around food sources
- Make affordable, fair, sustainable, and culturally appropriate food the norm in every neighborhood

### **Environment**

- Phase out factory farming
- Promote sustainable farming, fish, and ranching
- Close the loop on waste, runoff, and energy