



THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10007

August 15, 2022

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

I want to thank the White House for convening the first Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health in over fifty years. I commend the Biden-Harris Administration's commitment to bring an end to hunger, increase access to healthy food choices, and address one of the leading causes for diet-related diseases and death within our communities. In the City of New York (NYC), over 1.4 million residents experience food insecurity. More than half of adults in NYC are overweight or have obesity, and nearly one in five of our children have obesity, putting them at a far higher risk of lifelong chronic illnesses such as heart disease and diabetes. As you know, providing access to a high-quality, affordable, plant-based diet is essential to directly addressing this challenge.

Therefore, from the start, my administration has been focused on increasing the supply of plant-powered, fresh, and nutritious food for New Yorkers. We launched Plant-Powered Fridays at NYC Department of Education (NYC DOE), the nation's largest school food program. We also institutionalized the largest Good Food Purchasing program in the country and administered fresh produce into the nation's only municipal emergency food system. We are also launching innovative programs from a Produce Prescription program at our public hospitals, to Groceries to Go NYC, a program that supports food insecure New Yorkers, while letting them shop at local food businesses. In addition, we are investing in our infrastructure — from renovating the Hunts Point Food Distribution Center (FDC), which is one of the largest wholesale distribution centers in the world and provides 25% of the City's produce, to upgrading 100 school kitchens, and creating new urban farms on our public housing properties.

In addition to this work, I have spoken with mayors, municipal leaders, and stakeholders nationwide about ending hunger and diet-related diseases; and on June 21<sup>st</sup>, I convened a conference of NYC food policy leaders to collect our best ideas. I am delighted to share this list of innovative recommendations that can help all Americans eat healthier, more delicious, affordable,

and accessible food with increased produce options that directly tie into the five White House Conference Pillars.

White House Conference Pillar 1: Improve food access and affordability to improve the quality and availability of food assistance provided by all levels of government. NYC recommends:

- **Increasing the availability of fresh, local produce in school food.** The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) can do this by making it easier for small food producers to get approval for the USDA Foods Program, creating preferences for inter/intrastate purchases, allowing state and local government agencies to purchase local foods using commodity letters, and streamlining micro-purchasing rules.
- **Expanding the reach of Federal Safety Net and make it easier to use.** We recommend that the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Women, Infants, and Children Program (WIC) be increased to meet actual food costs and have expanded eligibility criteria specifically for youth and college students, as well as for low-income families. For example, increasing the SNAP net and gross income standards would expand eligibility and increase SNAP benefits for low-income families who are still experiencing the effects of the pandemic and simultaneously, diminished food purchasing power. Additionally, authorizing a higher standard medical deduction for all age groups, without requiring documentation, would eliminate a hurdle that prevents more individuals and families who have unreimbursed medical expenses from benefitting from this valuable deduction that could increase their household's SNAP benefit and improve their overall health.<sup>1</sup> WIC benefits for children should be extended up to the age of six and nutritional criteria and stock standards should be enhanced. The USDA should make it easy for small vendors to accept SNAP online and enable SNAP dollars to be used for delivery and related costs as well for hot/prepared foods. The USDA should also make support for both summer meals and summer EBT (summer-EBT) permanent programs to assist families when school is out. Specifically, permanently allowing non-congregate meal provision and expand the rural pilot of summer-EBT to urban areas to stimulate local economies. The USDA should further simplify SNAP administration, thereby reducing participation barriers and allowing program staff to focus on assisting SNAP participants. Crucial simplification steps include: lengthening certification periods, relaxing interview requirements when sufficient documentation is provided, aligning documentation requirements to Medicaid or permitting attestation in lieu of certain documentation, easing periodic reporting requirements for select populations, facilitating phone-applications by relaxing the application signature requirement, and waiving requirements regarding quality control errors and overpayment collections during the entirety of the Public Health Emergency.
- **Expanding funding for incentive programs.** The USDA should seek to expand funding for The Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP) that helps New Yorkers purchase healthy plant-powered foods without compromising on their ability to purchase culturally appropriate foods that meet their personal tastes.

White House Conference Pillar 2: Integrate nutrition and health to shift dollars from treatment to prevention by leveraging the health and health education systems that will increase food access and knowledge. NYC recommends:

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<sup>1</sup> Unreimbursed medical expenses may include co-pays and deductions, related travel costs, eyeglasses, dentures, hearing aids, prosthetics, and prescription or over-the-counter medication.

- **Enabling the usage of health dollars for healthy foods.** We recommend accelerating regulatory action to enable healthcare coverage for medically tailored meals, nutritional counseling from registered dietitians, produce prescriptions, and other healthy food programs, as well as nutritional education services.
- **Strengthening nutritional standards to include sustainability.** The USDA may also benefit from including environmental sustainability in the *2025-2030 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and encourage whole food, plant-based proteins. Additionally, creating national standards on expiration dates can save consumers money and reduce waste.
- **Advancing nutritional science to protect our health.** The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) can work to accelerate the work on heavy metal action levels in baby food and study the long-term effects of Low- and No-Calorie Sweeteners (LNCS) and ensure consumers understand what they are purchasing. It would also be helpful if the FDA set updated goals on sodium and set voluntary sugar reduction guidelines. The FDA can also work to improve and accelerate its research and evaluation on labeling plant-based milk, which is increasingly popular amongst consumers.
- **Investing in municipal public health innovation and nutrition education.** Local public health agencies across the country have historically led in developing innovative solutions to public health crises and the federal government should support that by increasing funding for them, including for innovative approaches to nutrition education.

White House Conference Pillar 3: Empower all consumers to make and have access to healthy choices to support consumers and promote their access to an affordable plant-based diet, we need to support the businesses and supply chain around them. The City of New York recommends:

- **Providing support to food businesses and nonprofits by making it easier for them to operate.** This includes win-win investments such as:
  - A new program to provide capital and operating grants to very small businesses and nonprofits that sell fresh produce in high-need areas to cover needs such as refrigeration.
  - U.S. Departments of Education (ED) and U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) investment in programs that reduce the cost of transporting produce to food businesses (known as “last mile”), including creating and streamlining federal programs to electrify truck fleets, create micro-distribution hubs, and support conversion to cargo bikes.
- **Supporting hyper-local produce production by meeting the needs of urban food growers.** The upcoming farm bill should amend USDA Food and Nutrition Service loans for farmers to include micro-grants and allow funding to be used by nonprofits. The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) can work to reduce apprenticeship timelines to increase workforce development opportunities for young people.
- **Increasing the overall supply of fresh produce by supporting rural-urban food connections.**
  - The USDA’s new Regional Food Enterprise Centers will be crucial in supporting the creation of farming businesses and essential processing and aggregation capacity to provide nutritious produce to cities like NYC — we applaud this work, which our regional partners strongly support, and hope to see it expanded. At the same time, the Regional Food System Partnerships grants should be increased to create capacity for urban and rural areas to strengthen their partnerships.

- These partnerships will also yield more fresh produce moving into the NYC. To enable that, we need more industrial space to distribute and process the food. This starts with approving NYC's largest Bipartisan Infrastructure Law grant application, to date, which would provide DOT funding for- the Hunts Point Terminal Produce Market's redevelopment. This would facilitate the creation of modern and resilient facility, keep and grow over 2,000 jobs and reduce emissions, while increasing its capacity to supply healthy produce to New Yorkers. It also means increasing grants and tax incentives for capital acquisitions and green infrastructure related to food production storage and distribution by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), U.S. Department of Commerce (DOC), ED, and U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) and creating electric charging stations for trucks.
- **Ensuring transparent food labeling to educate and support consumer health:**
  - The FDA must work to develop a standard label/icon for food items and meals that claim to have "healthy" nutrient content. We also urge the FDA to update labeling requirements for toddler milks to prohibit the use of term "formula," clarify that they are not intended for children under 12 months and clearly state that the products content added sugar.
  - The FDA would also make it easier for consumers to understand the nutritional content of their menus by creating a national public nutrition database for major restaurants and require added sugar labeling on menus for major chain restaurants.
- **Supporting federal legislation to curtail "predatory advertising" of unhealthy junk food to children:**
  - The Federal Trade Commission (FTC), USDA, and FDA can help to protect our children by supporting legislation aimed at eliminating the advertising of unhealthy junk food to children. This advocacy would help to address high childhood obesity rates and related health risks such as type-2 diabetes and hypertension. These conditions often have lifelong effects both physically and economically and predominantly effect communities of color—the primary target of such advertising.

White House Conference Pillar 4: Support physical activity for all through efforts to incentivize physical activity through public/private partnerships. NYC recommends:

- **Implementing strategies that promote physical activity:**
  - ED should seek to provide states and localities with federal grant funding to pilot programs that support young adults in the summer months by connecting them with local fitness and/or community centers to focus on their physical and mental health.

White House Conference Pillar 5: Enhanced nutrition and food security research through the collection of better data and research can lead to improved decision making and reduce costs. NYC recommends:

- **The collection of critical data and research to educate and support consumer health:**
  - There are particular areas of interest, such as food source transparency for USDA Foods Programs and the inclusion of the precise location for which these nutritious foods are procured. In addition, it would be helpful to include detailed information on whether DOL violations relating to food workers were enforced; a National Science Foundation (NSF) challenge on produce and freight; and increased

investment and staffing in the Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition (CFSAN).

Thank you for considering the City of New York's recommendations. We truly appreciate your ongoing support and collaborative efforts to improve nutrition and physical activity across the country. We share your commitment to bring an end to hunger and diet-related diseases and look forward to further partnership with you on these matters.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Eric Adams in black ink.

Eric Adams  
Mayor

CC:  
The Honorable James P. McGovern  
Member of Congress  
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Cory A. Booker  
Member of Congress  
U.S. Senate