



COMPREHENSIVE FOOD SYSTEM ASSESSMENT

Toward a Regional Food System: Broome and Tioga Counties

Internal Report

Prepared for:

Broome County Food Council

Prepared by:

Seeds of Change Consulting

LaShauna Austria, Principal Consultant

Yasmeen Lee

Min Jae Kim

January 2026

Acknowledgements

Support for this work was provided by the New York Health Foundation (NYHealth). NYHealth's mission is to improve the health of all New Yorkers, especially people of color and others who have been historically marginalized.

The views presented here are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the NYHealth or its directors, officers, and staff.



This assessment was made possible through the contributions of community members, farmers, service providers, and stakeholders across Broome and Tioga Counties who shared their time, expertise, and lived experiences.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	1
Table of Contents.....	2
Executive Summary.....	5
1. Methodology.....	8
1.1 Online Community & Stakeholder Survey.....	8
1.2 Focus Group Discussions.....	8
1.3 Key Informant Interviews.....	9
1.4 Site Visits & In-Person Engagement.....	10
2. Hunger Education.....	11
2.1 Public Perception and the “Illusion of Scarcity”.....	11
2.2 Stigma: The Silent Barrier.....	11
2.3 The Reality of Educational Initiatives.....	12
2.4 Strategic Recommendations.....	12
3. Food Waste & Recovery.....	14
3.1 Community Perceptions of Waste Sources.....	14
3.2 The Critical Role of Recovery in the Emergency Food System.....	15
3.3 Operational Barriers to Expanding Recovery and Distribution.....	15
3.4 Preferred Policy and Programmatic Solutions.....	16
3.5 Strategic Recommendations for Food Waste Reduction and Recovery.....	17
4. Public Health & Nutrition.....	19
4.1. The Food Environment: Availability vs. Access.....	19
4.2. Structural Barriers to Food Access: Transportation and Housing.....	19
4.3. Vulnerable Populations and the ALICE Demographic.....	20
4.4. Systemic Integration and Solutions.....	21
4.5 Systemic Recommendations for Public Health & Nutrition.....	21
5. Strategic Development for Small Farms and Regional Supply Chains.....	23
5.1 Data Sources and Methodology.....	23
5.2 Community Prioritization of Local Agriculture.....	23
5.3 Balancing Viability with Affordability.....	24
5.4 Regional Interdependency.....	24
5.5 The Role of Farms in Food Recovery and System Resilience.....	25
5.6 Structural and Environmental Challenges.....	25
5.7 Strategic Recommendations.....	26
6. Broome County Food Council Action Plan Expansion: Systemic and Prioritized Recommendations.....	28
6.1 Advocacy and Public Policy Work Group.....	28
6.2 Transportation Work Group.....	30

6.3 Underserved Populations Work Group.....	31
6.4 Families with Young Children Work Group.....	32
6.5 Marketing and Communication Work Group.....	33
6.6 Steering Committee (Leadership).....	35
7. Tioga County: Community and Stakeholder Experiences.....	36
7.1. The “Rural Penalty”: Transportation and Geographic Isolation.....	36
7.2. Economic Strain and Rising Demand.....	36
7.3. The Agricultural Disconnect: Land Rich, Market Poor.....	37
7.4. Resilience and Community Action.....	37
7.5. Summary of Key Needs and Actionable Priorities for Tioga County.....	38
8. Survey Metrics Overview.....	39
9. Community & Agriculture Resilience Audit Tool (CARAT) Assessment: Broome-Tioga Regional Foodshed.....	41
Introduction.....	41
Theme 1: Natural Resource Management, Use, & Conservation.....	42
Theme 2: Community Health & Well-Being.....	44
Theme 3: Community Self-Reliance in Food.....	46
Theme 4: Distributive & Democratic Leadership.....	47
Theme 5: Focus on Local Farmers, Processors, & Distributors.....	48
Theme 6: Food Sovereignty.....	49
Theme 7: Place-Based Economics.....	50
CARAT Summary Insight.....	51
Cross-Reference to Main Report.....	52
10. CARAT Case Study: Hindlewood Farm.....	53
Introduction.....	53
Methodology Note.....	53
Farm Profile.....	54
Farm Vision.....	54
Focus Area 1: Hunger Education.....	55
Focus Area 2: Food Waste & Recovery.....	56
Focus Area 3: Public Health & Nutrition.....	56
Focus Area 4: Farmland & Small Farm Development.....	57
Focus Area 5: Food Access Plan Expansion.....	60
CARAT Framework Analysis.....	61
CARAT Theme Summary Table.....	63
Questions for Future Consideration.....	64
Cross-Cutting Observation.....	66
Appendix A: Stakeholder Engagement Summary.....	67

Engagement Methods and Participants.....	67
Key Themes, Quotes, and Metrics.....	68
Appendix B: Community Survey Responses (Disaggregated).....	71
Appendix C: Data Collection Tools.....	81
Community Survey.....	81
Interview Guide: Policy/Ag Support.....	86
Virtual Interview Guide: Food Systems Stakeholder.....	88
Virtual Interview Guide: Farmer & Producer.....	90
Focus Group Guide: Hunger Education.....	92
Focus Group Guide: Food Waste and Recovery.....	94
Focus Group Guide: Public Health and Nutrition.....	96
Focus Group Guide: Farmland & Small Farm Development in Broome County.....	98
Focus Group Guide: Strengthening Tioga County’s Food & Farm Economy.....	101
Appendix D: Resources & References.....	103
Federal Policy & Legislation.....	103
New York State Policy & Programs.....	103
Frameworks & Tools.....	103
Economic Data Sources.....	104
Cross-County Resources.....	104
Additional Data Sources.....	104

Executive Summary

This Comprehensive Food System Assessment offers a clear and urgent picture of the food system serving Broome and Tioga Counties. Drawing on community surveys, focus groups, interviews, site visits, and the Community & Agriculture Resilience Audit Tool (CARAT) framework, the assessment reveals that food insecurity in the region is not caused by a lack of food, but by deeper structural conditions, most notably the cost of living, housing instability, transportation barriers, and fragile local infrastructure. These barriers are interconnected, each tied to the fundamental challenge of household incomes that do not stretch far enough to cover basic needs. They affect urban and rural communities differently, yet bind the two counties together in a shared regional food ecosystem that functions as a single, interdependent foodshed.

Across both counties, residents and organizations report rising demand for emergency food alongside shrinking public benefits and increasing costs. Survey respondents rated food access at 2.6 on a scale of 1 (very poor) to 5 (excellent) and identified transportation and cost as the most significant barriers. These barriers are rooted in economic reality: according to the [New York State Community Action Association](#), 18.9% of Broome County residents live in poverty, and another 25% are [ALICE households](#) (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed)—meaning nearly half (44%) of all households earn too little to afford basic necessities. In Tioga County, 27% of households are ALICE. The inability to afford or access nutrient-dense foods contributes to diet-related health disparities, as these households earn too much to qualify for benefits but too little to afford a nutritious diet. The situation is more acute in the City of Binghamton, where 32.9% of residents and 41.6% of children live in poverty. In Broome County, food insecurity is closely tied to housing instability and affordability, limiting people’s ability to store, prepare, and access healthy food. In Tioga County, geographic isolation and the absence of reliable public transit create a “rural penalty,” cutting residents off from grocery stores, healthcare, and food assistance while also isolating farmers from local markets.

The assessment also identified significant public health and nutrition concerns beyond hunger itself. Stakeholders described the food environment as a “food swamp”—an area where inexpensive, unhealthy processed options are more readily available than fresh, nutritious food. Addressing food insecurity in this region, therefore, requires attention not only to whether people have enough to eat, but to the nutritional quality of what is available and affordable.

Compounding these challenges is a persistent gap between public perception and the lived experience of hunger. While food appears plentiful on store shelves, many community members face stigma, misinformation, and judgment when seeking help. Hunger education efforts often reach those already engaged while missing broader audiences, reinforcing the need for approaches rooted in lived experience, dignity, and practical information rather than awareness alone.

Food waste and recovery emerged as both a challenge and a lifeline. Organizations like CHOW’s Broome Bounty program and Good Neighbors rescue surplus food and get it to those in need—one representative reported that up to 80 percent of what they distribute comes from recovery sources. Yet this system is fragile, constrained by limited cold storage, aging volunteer pools, and insufficient transportation. Survey respondents recognize this vulnerability and overwhelmingly support policy solutions to address it: encouraging food donation, expanding recovery programs, and investing in infrastructure. Food recovery operates alongside other

critical partners, including the [Food Bank of the Southern Tier](#), which distributed over 1.4 million pounds of fresh produce to pantries in Broome County in 2024.

Local agriculture is widely viewed as central to long-term food security, public health, and regional resilience. Survey respondents ranked support for local farms and food businesses as the top policy priority across both counties. However, farmers, particularly in Tioga County, face significant economic pressures, including high property taxes, labor shortages, and limited processing and distribution infrastructure. While Tioga County is rich in farmland, much of the food produced there leaves the county due to weak local markets and logistical barriers, reinforcing the need for coordinated, cross-county supply chain solutions. To strengthen these local markets, survey respondents expressed strong interest in expanded access through farm stands and farmers' markets—a priority that can be advanced both by improving awareness of existing options and by strategically locating new outlets in underserved areas.

Taken together, the findings point to an opportunity to build on the Broome County Food Council's existing collaborative work by deepening coordination and expanding toward systemic change across the regional foodshed. The report advances a regional foodshed approach that formally recognizes the interdependence of Broome and Tioga Counties and prioritizes action along a continuum from immediate response to long-term transformation. Key recommendations focus on:

- Building coalitions with workforce development and economic stability partners to address the economic insecurity underlying food insecurity
- Treating housing and transportation as core food security strategies
- Strengthening food recovery infrastructure through policy, funding, and logistics
- Supporting local farms with incentives, market access, and regional distribution systems
- Reducing stigma through lived-experience storytelling and clear, centralized communication
- Developing integrated service “hub” models that connect food access with healthcare, childcare, and economic supports

This assessment provides both a diagnostic and a roadmap. It affirms the dedication and resilience of community organizations, farmers, and residents while making clear that the current system is fragile and unsustainable without structural investment. By acting on the recommendations outlined in this report, the Broome County Food Council and its partners have a timely opportunity to build a more equitable, resilient, and regionally connected food system, one that ensures access to healthy, affordable food is not dependent on geography, income, or crisis, but is treated as a shared public good.

To realize this vision, the following priority actions should guide immediate focus:

- **Formalize Regional Governance:** Establish the operating structure to treat Broome and Tioga as a single foodshed for planning, grants, and collaboration
- **Launch Integrated “Hub” Models:** Pilot one or two service hubs that co-locate food, healthcare, and childcare to reduce navigation barriers

- **Elevate Housing Policy:** Formally include affordable housing as a primary food security strategy in the Council's policy priorities
- **Formalize Broome-Tioga Logistics:** Establish dedicated transportation corridors to move Tioga-produced food to Broome distribution hubs
- **Secure Major Systemic Funding:** Lead efforts to secure grant funding for resource-intensive systemic recommendations

1. Methodology

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the current food system landscape in Broome and Tioga Counties, this assessment utilized a mixed-methods approach. This strategy integrated quantitative data from an online community survey with qualitative insights gathered through targeted focus groups, one-on-one key informant interviews, and in-person field observations.

The data collection instruments—including survey questions, focus group guides, and interview protocols—were originally drafted by **Seeds of Change Consulting**. These drafts underwent a rigorous review and revision process by the **Broome County Food Council Steering Committee** to ensure cultural relevance, clarity, and alignment with regional priorities.

Note on Timing: Data collection for this assessment occurred during a period of heightened uncertainty regarding federal SNAP policy (late 2025). This context may have elevated concerns about benefit cuts and food assistance in respondent feedback. While the themes identified throughout this report reflect longstanding structural challenges, readers should be aware that the intensity of certain concerns—particularly around SNAP and emergency food demand—may reflect this specific moment in time.

1.1 Online Community & Stakeholder Survey

An online survey was developed to capture broad feedback from community members and stakeholders actively engaged in the local food system. The survey was distributed digitally to community members of both Broome and Tioga Counties by the Broome County Food Council Manager via email. Selection of individuals to contact for participation was determined by the discretion of the Broome County Food Council Manager. All questions in the survey were made optional to allow for ease of completion for respondents given that participation was not compensated upon completion.

Survey Response Breakdown: A total of **51** unique individual responses were collected during the open period. It is important to note that survey respondents could select more than one county for work and/or residence. The geographic distribution of respondents was as follows:

- **Broome County:** 30 responses
- **Tioga County:** 26 responses

Respondents included a mix of general community members, food system advocates, and individuals who are engaged with the Broome County Food Council (30 respondents). The remaining 21 respondents were not engaged with the Council. Summarized data and insights from the community survey are reflected throughout the report, particularly in the food access plan expansion section. A breakdown of survey responses by county can be found in the appendix in addition to the survey itself. Survey responses are shown as categorical answers.

1.2 Focus Group Discussions

Focus groups were utilized to facilitate in-depth discussions on specific, high-priority topics identified by the Steering Committee. Participants for focus groups were recruited by the Broome County Food Council Steering Committee and general members. These sessions allowed for a deeper exploration of barriers, opportunities, and community sentiments regarding

the local food environment. Data from focus groups are reflected in each of the distinct report sections related to the topic area.

Moderators facilitated discussions based on the following thematic areas:

- **Public Health & Nutrition:** Two (2) separate focus groups were conducted to discuss the intersection of food access, nutrition education, and community health outcomes. The stakeholders that participated included Broome Food Council members, health department staff, community-based organization staff, university faculty, and county agency staff. In total, 13 participants attended (including 1 additional participant beyond the 12 invited).
- **Food Waste & Recovery:** Three (3) separate focus groups were convened to explore food rescue operations and general waste reduction strategies. In total, 14 of the 16 invited participants attended the focus group, for a response rate of 88%.
- **Hunger Education:** A dedicated session focused on destigmatizing hunger and improving public understanding of food insecurity. The stakeholders who participated included Broome Food Council members, non-profit staff, and food pantry and food bank staff. In total, 4 of the 9 invited participants attended the focus group, for a response rate of 44%.
- **Small Farms & Farmland Development (Broome County):** A session dedicated to the specific needs and challenges of land access and viability for producers in Broome County. The stakeholders who participated included Broome Food Council members, small- and large-scale farmers, community-based organization staff, and Cooperative Extension staff. In total, 5 participants attended the focus group, resulting in a 100% response rate among those invited.
- **Small Farms & Farmland Development (Tioga County):** A distinct session focused on the unique agricultural landscape and development needs of Tioga County producers. The stakeholders that participated included Cooperative Extension staff, small farmers, and county agency staff. In total, 4 of the 6 invited participants responded, for a response rate of 67%.

1.3 Key Informant Interviews

To supplement the group discussions, one-on-one interviews were conducted with specific high-level stakeholders. Participants for interviews were recruited by the Broome County Food Council Steering Committee. These interviews were designed to gather expert opinions, policy insights, and distinct producer perspectives that might not surface in a group setting. Information from these conversations was used to provide context and identify relevant policies, programs, and regulations that both hinder and enable the food systems in Broome and Tioga counties. Stakeholders in either of the following groups were interviewed with a specific interview guide, found in the appendix.

The interview process engaged the following key stakeholder groups:

- **Policy & Agriculture-Support Stakeholders:** Four interviews with individuals in policy-making or support roles to understand the regulatory and structural environment.

- **General Stakeholders:** Eleven interviews with broader community partners active in both counties to capture a holistic view of the regional food system.

1.4 Site Visits & In-Person Engagement

To further ground the assessment in the local reality, an in-person visit to Broome County was conducted. In-person connections were established and facilitated by the Broome County Food Council Steering Committee. This field engagement included general site visits, informal conversations with community members, and essential context-setting for the project team.

As part of this fieldwork, a specific site visit was conducted with a small family farm in Broome County. This visit provided an opportunity to observe on-farm operations firsthand and engage in direct dialogue regarding the unique challenges facing family-owned agricultural businesses in the region.

2. Hunger Education

This section explores the current landscape of public understanding regarding food insecurity in Broome County. The findings presented below are synthesized from **a dedicated focus group session on hunger education and advocacy**, along with quantitative and qualitative data from the **county-wide Community Survey**.

2.1 Public Perception and the “Illusion of Scarcity”

Data from the focus group and survey indicate a stark disconnect between the reality of hunger and the general public’s (broader Broome County community members) perception of it. While crisis events may temporarily spike awareness, deep-seated misconceptions obscure the true nature of the problem.

- **The Understanding Gap:** Survey results show that the vast majority of respondents believe the public has a limited understanding of local hunger. When asked “How well do you think the public understands hunger and food insecurity in your community?”, the most frequent responses were “A little” or “Somewhat”, with very few selecting “Very well”.
- **Invisible Barriers:** One survey respondent poignantly described the public’s view as suffering from an **“illusion of scarcity,”** noting that while food appears abundant in stores, the public fails to see the “cost of food, transportation difficulties” that make it inaccessible.
- **Lived Experience vs. Assumption:** Focus group participants expressed frustration that those without lived experience often rely on assumptions rather than facts. As one participant shared: *“People are surprised when I tell them how difficult it is to work out of poverty ... they have assumptions. The general public has no clue about how difficult things are.”*

2.2 Stigma: The Silent Barrier

Stigma was identified as a persistent cultural and structural barrier. It not only prevents individuals from accessing resources but also distorts public discourse on solutions.

- **Prevalence of Stigma:** In the community survey, **“Stigma or difficulty asking for help”** was repeatedly selected as a top barrier to food access. One respondent specifically noted that “The entitlement mentality is pervasive... encourage people to work,” reflecting the very judgment that focus group members fear.
- **Harmful Narratives:** Focus group participants discussed the emotional toll of stereotypes, such as the “welfare queen” trope. One participant described the experience of seeking assistance: *“The dominant narrative ... is that folks on SNAP don’t want to work or are lazy—this is mostly incorrect... There’s a dehumanization of people who ask for help ... even among people who claim to be intelligent.”*
- **The Fear of Judgment:** Even in rural areas, stigma prevents access. A survey respondent from a local farm/sanctuary noted *“horror stories about being turned away or banned for showing up at the wrong time,”* which compounds the fear of asking for help.

A Note on Misinformation Within the Sector: Harmful narratives about food assistance are not limited to the general public. Focus group discussions and stakeholder feedback suggest that misinformation sometimes circulates among those working in the food access space—for example, discouraging others from using food pantries based on assumptions about dietary restrictions or food quality that may not reflect current practices. Addressing stigma, therefore, requires not only public education but also ongoing communication and learning within the food security community itself.

2.3 The Reality of Educational Initiatives

While there is a desire for more education, current efforts often miss the mark or fail to reach those who need them most.

- **Reach and Impact:** Focus group participants felt that current workshops (like hunger simulations) often amount to “preaching to the choir,” reaching people who are already sympathetic while missing the broader public.
- **Information vs. Survival:** A critical insight from the survey is that traditional education cannot replace access to resources. A nutrition educator emphasized that for families in crisis, survival takes precedence over “learning”: *“People are hungry, so having food is more important than learning about it. Some don’t have the time free to take a class, even though what is being taught would help them know how to manage their food prep time... stretching what they do have to last more for more meals.”*
- **Demand for Practical Knowledge:** Despite barriers, there is a clear demand for specific types of education. In the survey, **“More information about food expiration/safety”** was cited 20 times as a key solution to reducing food waste. This suggests a public appetite for practical, logistical knowledge rather than just awareness.

2.4 Strategic Recommendations

Based on the synthesis of the focus group and survey data, the following strategies are recommended to improve hunger education and reduce stigma in Broome County.

1. Bridge the Empathy Gap with Lived Experience

- **Shadow Programs:** Implement a “Shadow Day” in which local decision-makers and policymakers shadow someone with lived experience of food insecurity. As one focus group participant envisioned: *“In a dream world, every decision-maker would have to shadow someone with lived experience for a day.”*
- **Humanize the Narrative:** Move beyond statistics by using video storytelling. Create short, respectful video reels that “demystify the pantry” or show a “day in the life” of a resident navigating the food system to normalize the use of assistance programs. The Food Council has already begun this work—the ALICE video developed by the Advocacy and Public Policy Work group is a strong example of humanizing the narrative. Expanding the use and visibility of this existing resource, while developing additional content, can build momentum without starting from scratch.

2. Centralize and Simplify Communication

- **Unified Information Hub:** Address the fragmentation of information cited by multiple survey respondents. Create a “**comprehensive communication network**” or a single, easy-to-use local database that lists all food resources, hours, and eligibility requirements.
- **Digital Integration:** Survey respondents suggested using “**Apps or technology**” (cited 24 times) to connect extra food with people, which could also serve as a channel for distributing educational information on food safety and resources.

3. Focus Education on Practical Utility

A Note on Scope: The recommendations below address practical knowledge that supports both hunger education (helping the public understand food insecurity) and nutrition education (helping individuals make informed food choices). While nutrition education is addressed more fully in Section 4: Public Health & Nutrition, these recommendations are included here because they emerged directly from hunger education focus group discussions and relate to reducing stigma around food safety and resource use.

- **Food Safety Campaigns:** Launch a public education campaign specifically clarifying “Best By” vs. “Expiration” dates. This directly addresses the survey finding that “More information about food expiration/safety” is a top priority for the community and aids in waste reduction.
- **Resource-First Approach:** Educational programming, such as cooking classes, provides valuable skills and knowledge that help reduce food insecurity. When funding and logistics allow, pairing education with direct resource provision (e.g., free groceries or equipment) can help address barriers to participation, such as time and transportation. However, the value of education does not depend on resource provision—the skills learned have a lasting impact regardless of whether tangible resources are included.

3. Food Waste & Recovery

Understanding food waste and recovery in Broome County requires first understanding the broader emergency food ecosystem. This system includes three distinct but interconnected components: food recovery organizations (such as CHOW's Broome Bounty program and Good Neighbors) that rescue surplus food from retailers, restaurants, and farms; emergency food distribution sites (such as food pantries and community meal programs) that provide food directly to community members; and the Food Bank of the Southern Tier (FBST), which serves as a major supplier, providing both purchased and donated food to partner agencies throughout the region. These entities work together, but face different operational realities and challenges. Broome County is notably home to one of the most robust food recovery programs in New York State through CHOW's Broome Bounty initiative, conducted in partnership with Good Neighbors.

3.1 Community Perceptions of Waste Sources

Data from the Community Survey indicates that residents have a high level of awareness of food waste, with many respondents (23 out of 49) explicitly reporting that they have witnessed food waste as an issue where they live or work. This question may have been interpreted as either the larger community and/or immediate environment such as home or place of employment.

When identifying where the most food is wasted, survey respondents pointed towards commercial entities rather than individuals. It is important to note that these findings reflect community perceptions rather than measured waste data; however, this perception aligns with a desire for systemic solutions rather than individual behavior change:

- **Restaurants:** Identified as the primary source of waste, receiving 41 mentions.
- **Grocery Stores:** The second most cited source, with 37 mentions.
- **Households:** While significant, households ranked third (24 mentions), suggesting that public perception views waste as largely a supply-chain and retail issue.

Beyond the moral imperative of redirecting edible food to those in need, food waste reduction carries significant environmental implications. The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has identified food waste in landfills as a major source of methane, a potent greenhouse gas. Reducing food waste through recovery and redistribution, therefore, serves both food security and climate resilience goals.

Existing Innovation - Prepared Meals: It is worth noting that organizations like CHOW are already innovating beyond traditional food recovery. CHOW's prepared meal initiative provides chef-prepared frozen meals to individuals who lack cooking facilities, such as those in temporary housing. This model addresses both food waste—by extending the usable life of recovered food—and the practical barriers many households face when they have access to food but no means to cook it. Such innovations point toward a more comprehensive approach to food access that meets people where they are.

3.2 The Critical Role of Recovery in the Emergency Food System

Understanding food waste and recovery in Broome County requires first understanding the broader emergency food ecosystem. This system includes three distinct but interconnected components: food recovery organizations (such as CHOW's Broome Bounty program and Good Neighbors) that rescue surplus food from retailers, restaurants, and farms; emergency food distribution sites (such as food pantries and community meal programs) that provide food directly to community members; and the Food Bank of the Southern Tier (FBST), which serves as a major supplier, providing both purchased and donated food to partner agencies throughout the region. These entities work together, but face different operational realities and challenges.

Broome County's food recovery capacity is anchored by CHOW's Broome Bounty initiative, conducted in partnership with Good Neighbors. This capacity is made possible through a Redistribution Organization (RDO) contract between CHOW and FBST. The RDO relationship connects CHOW to Feeding America's Retail Recovery Program, enabling large-scale food rescue from major retailers including Walmart, BJ's, Target, and Sam's Club. Without FBST's Feeding America affiliation and the logistics, technology, and partnership infrastructure it provides, recovery at this scale would not be possible.

Within the City of Binghamton, Binghamton Food Rescue provides additional recovery capacity with support from Good Neighbors, operating independently of the Broome County Food Council coordination.

- **Reliance on Recovery:** Some food recovery organizations reported that recovery has become central to their operations. One representative from a food recovery program noted, *"About 80% of the food we distribute is from recovery—retail, grocery, and even farm partners."* This figure may reflect the specific model of food recovery organizations like CHOW and affiliated pantries, rather than the broader pantry network, many of which source significant quantities of food through FBST and other channels.
- **Supply Chain Necessity:** This reliance is driven partly by complications and delays in the traditional supply chain. Participants noted that lead times on ordered products have doubled, sometimes stretching to two months, making recovery essential to maintain inventory.
- **Filling Fresh Food Gaps:** Recovery plays an important role in sourcing fresh items that are otherwise difficult to obtain in sufficient quantities. One participant from CHOW emphasized that *"meat and produce are always the two major things we need,"* and recovery partnerships are one key strategy for securing these nutrient-dense foods. It should be noted that FBST also provides significant quantities of fresh produce to partner agencies—distributing over [1.4 million pounds in Broome County](#) and [330,000 pounds in Tioga County](#) in 2024 alone—and that pantries can order meat and produce through FBST and CHOW. Recovery complements, rather than replaces, these established supply channels.

3.3 Operational Barriers to Expanding Recovery and Distribution

Both data sources highlight infrastructure gaps, though they focus on different aspects of the problem. **Focus Group** participants described the infrastructure supporting emergency food

operations as “fragile,” citing specific internal bottlenecks that prevent them from accepting and distributing more food.

- **Cold Storage Limitations:** Insufficient cold storage capacity limits pantries’ ability to accept fresh food donations, even when it is available. One pantry representative explained the logistical heartbreak of turning away food: *“Our warehouse is relatively small... sometimes we can’t get as much food as we want because of space.”* This challenge may be compounded when pantries are already using available cold storage for food ordered through FBST or other suppliers, leaving limited capacity for recovered food when it becomes available.
- **Volunteer Constraints:** The workforce powering pantry operations and food distribution is aging, creating physical limitations for the labor-intensive work of food handling and food transport. A participant noted, *“Our volunteer pool is aging—average volunteer age is now over 75, and there’s little coming up behind them.”*
- **Transportation: Community Survey** respondents reinforced this logistical struggle, citing “Better transportation or delivery options” (19 mentions) as a crucial need. Without reliable transport, the connection between “wasted food” and “hungry people” cannot be made.

3.4 Preferred Policy and Programmatic Solutions

The **Community Survey** provides a clear hierarchy of preferred solutions, indicating that residents believe systemic changes—particularly through policy—are the most effective ways to combat food waste.

- **Policy Support:** The top-ranked solution for food waste was “Policies that support donating food,” with 35 mentions. Similarly, “Incentives for donating food” was ranked as a high-priority policy change by 28 respondents. It is worth noting that supportive policies already exist at the federal and state levels, including the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act, which provides liability protection for good-faith food donors, and the NYS Food Donation and Food Scrap Recycling Law, which requires large food waste generators to donate edible food. This suggests that increased awareness and communication about existing protections may be as important as developing new policies.
- **Programmatic Support:** “More food recovery programs” was the second-highest-ranked solution to waste (28 mentions).
- **Technology and Logistics:** Respondents supported the use of apps or technology to connect extra food with people who need it (24 mentions).

Stakeholder Note on Systemic Change: Focus group participants strongly echoed the survey’s call for policy change, warning that without addressing root causes, recovery is only a temporary fix. As one stakeholder powerfully stated, *“This is band-aid work. We’re not ending poverty... SNAP is a band-aid, not a solution. People rely wholly and completely on it and emergency food to maintain life.”* This suggests that while recovery policies are vital, they must be paired with broader economic support.

A Note on Sustainability: This stakeholder insight raises an important strategic consideration for the region’s food security planning. The current reliance on food recovery, while essential, is inherently dependent on surplus from retailers, restaurants, and farms. Economic pressures such as tariffs, inflation, and “shrinkflation” may prompt businesses to better match supply with demand, potentially reducing the volume of food available for recovery. A resilient food system must therefore pursue food recovery as one component of a broader strategy that also addresses root causes of food insecurity—including wages, housing, and transportation—rather than relying on recovery as a primary solution.

3.5 Strategic Recommendations for Food Waste Reduction and Recovery

Based on the community’s policy preferences and the operational barriers cited by frontline stakeholders, systemic solutions for food waste should focus on building upon existing strengths while addressing identified gaps:

- **Policy and Financial Incentives:**
 - Increase awareness and utilization of existing policies that protect food donors, including the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act and NYS Food Donation and Food Scrap Recycling Law. Consider coordinated outreach through County Health Department inspections to communicate these protections to potential donors.
 - Where gaps exist, advocate for strengthened policies that support donating food and provide financial incentives to encourage participation from retailers, restaurants, and farms.
 - Explore available state funding, including DEC grants for food waste reduction strategies, to support infrastructure and program development.
- **Programmatic and Technological Expansion:**
 - Continue to build on the success of existing programs like CHOW’s Broome Bounty—one of the most robust food recovery initiatives in New York State—by investing in expanded capacity across the region.
 - Develop and promote the use of **apps or technology** to create efficient, real-time connections between sources of extra food and organizations that need it.
- **Infrastructure and Workforce Development:**
 - Address critical infrastructure gaps, particularly the lack of **cold storage capacity** in food pantries and distribution sites. Notably, the Creating Healthy Schools and Communities (CHSC) grant, sponsored by the New York State Department of Health, currently provides cold storage funding to food access sites in the region; increased outreach may help connect more sites with this available resource.
 - Develop and fund programs to improve **transportation and delivery options** for food recovery logistics.

- Implement strategies to recruit and retain a new pool of volunteers or paid staff to address the constraints posed by an aging pantry and distribution volunteers.

4. Public Health & Nutrition

Scope Note: This section examines the intersection of food access and community health as reported by stakeholders. Nutrition outcomes (e.g., dietary intake, nutritional status) and specific health metrics (e.g., disease prevalence) were not directly measured in this assessment. The findings below reflect community perceptions of the food environment and structural barriers to healthy eating.

4.1. The Food Environment: Availability vs. Access

This section synthesizes findings from two primary sources: a wide-reaching Community Survey (capturing resident and provider perspectives) and a Focus Group Summary involving public health and nutrition stakeholders. Together, these sources reveal that food insecurity in Broome County is a complex community challenge driven by structural barriers rather than a simple lack of food supply.

Data from both sources suggest that while food is technically available, the environment is not optimized for health, creating significant barriers to nutritious eating.

Community Survey Findings:

- **Perceived Access:** Respondents generally rated food access as poor, with an average of 2.6 on a 5-point scale, indicating that access is neither excellent nor critically poor. This rating aligns with the specific barriers identified throughout this assessment and signals that community members recognize the structural challenges they face in accessing healthy, affordable food.
- **Barriers to Healthy Options:** While general access was rated average, specific barriers persist. “Limited fresh or healthy food” was cited by 22 respondents as a significant challenge.
- **Cost as a Determinant:** The “Cost of food” was the second most frequently cited barrier (34 mentions), confirming that financial constraints are a primary hurdle to accessing nutrition.

Focus Group Insights:

- **“Food Swamps” over Deserts:** Stakeholders described the environment as a “food swamp”—an area overwhelmed by inexpensive, unhealthy processed options—rather than a “food desert” where no food exists.
- **The Cost of Health:** Participants noted that even when healthy food is physically available, it is often financially out of reach compared to sugary, processed alternatives, forcing families to choose calorie-dense, nutrient-poor foods.

4.2. Structural Barriers to Food Access: Transportation and Housing

Both data streams identify non-food factors—specifically transportation and housing—as the critical barriers to food security in the county.

Community Survey Findings:

- **Transportation:** “Transportation or distance to stores” was the most frequently reported challenge to food access, with 37 mentions—more than cost or supply issues.
- **Housing Policy:** When asked about policy priorities, “More affordable housing” was highly ranked (28 mentions), highlighting that the community sees housing as inseparable from food security.

Focus Group Insights:

- **Rural vs. Urban Transit:** Stakeholders elaborated on the transportation data, noting that in rural areas, a lack of transit leaves people entirely cut off from healthcare and grocery stores. In urban settings, the physical burden of carrying groceries on public transit discourages bulk purchasing of healthy staples.
- **Housing Instability:** Housing instability was identified as a primary driver of health disparities. Participants noted that temporary housing (e.g., living in hotels) creates logistical barriers to storing and cooking fresh food, leaving families reliant on processed, shelf-stable items.

Connecting Thread: It is worth noting that transportation and housing barriers are themselves connected to economic security. When wages do not keep pace with the cost of living, families are forced into impossible trade-offs—choosing between rent and groceries, between car repairs and utilities. Addressing transportation and housing as food security strategies is necessary, but the underlying economic conditions that make housing unaffordable and reliable transportation inaccessible must also be acknowledged as part of the broader picture.

4.3. Vulnerable Populations and the ALICE Demographic

The focus groups provided deep context on specific populations that may be invisible in broader quantitative surveys.

Focus Group Insights:

- **The ALICE Households:** A recurring theme was the ALICE population—an acronym for Asset-Limited, Income-Constrained, Employed. ALICE households earn too much to qualify for benefits like SNAP but not enough to afford a nutritious diet. Stakeholders noted this group often relies on emergency food despite being employed. The [ALICE framework, developed by United Way](#) and used by the Broome County Food Council, provides a data-driven way to identify and advocate for this often-invisible population that falls through the gaps of traditional safety net programs.
- **Youth Risks:** Participants expressed concerns about children and youth, citing risks of obesity and poor nutrition associated with limited access to healthy food during out-of-school hours.

Community Survey Findings:

- **Policy Gaps:** The impact of policy on vulnerable groups was evident, with “SNAP/benefit cuts or delays” cited by 22 respondents as a major challenge to food

access. It is worth noting that this data was collected during a period of heightened uncertainty about federal SNAP policy (late 2025), which may have heightened the prominence of this concern in respondents' feedback. However, stakeholders also noted that delays may stem from administrative capacity issues at the Department of Social Services (DSS), including staffing constraints that slow application processing. This suggests that SNAP Administrative Advocacy—efforts to ensure adequate staffing and efficient processing at the local level—may be a viable intervention alongside federal benefit advocacy.

4.4. Systemic Integration and Solutions

There is a consensus across both sources that solutions must be systemic, integrating food access with broader support systems.

Focus Group Insights:

- **Silos and Navigation:** Stakeholders praised local collaboration but noted it is often hindered by funding silos and “ego issues.” They described the current system as bureaucratic, where “resource overload” (too many uncoordinated lists/maps) leads to navigation fatigue for families in crisis.
- **Hub Models:** Participants envisioned integrated solutions, such as “hub” models that co-locate food, healthcare, and childcare services to reduce barriers.

Community Survey Findings:

- **Top Policy Priorities:** The community's desire for systemic change is reflected in their top policy priorities. “Support for local farms and food businesses” was the #1 priority (34 mentions), followed closely by “Better transportation options” and “Increasing SNAP or other food benefits” (29 mentions each).

4.5 Systemic Recommendations for Public Health & Nutrition

To move beyond the “food swamp” environment and address barriers to nutritious eating, recommendations must integrate food access with broader structural determinants of food insecurity:

Note on Terminology: This assessment examines structural factors—housing, transportation, and economic stability—that shape food access. While these factors are widely recognized as social determinants of health, this assessment did not collect health outcomes data. The recommendations below address the structural conditions identified through community input, rather than specific nutrition or health metrics.

Root Cause: Economic Insecurity

The assessment findings make clear that food insecurity in Broome and Tioga Counties is fundamentally an economic problem. According to the [2025 New York State Community Action Association Poverty Report](#), 18.9% of Broome County residents live in poverty, and another 25% are ALICE households—meaning nearly half (44%) of all households earn too little to afford basic necessities. The situation is more acute in the City of Binghamton, where 32.9% of

residents and 41.6% of children live in poverty. *(Note: ALICE data is reported at the county level; city-level ALICE household percentages were not available for this assessment. However, given that poverty rates in Binghamton significantly exceed the county average, ALICE conditions are likely also more concentrated in the city.)*

The living wage for a single adult working 2080 hours per year with one child in Broome County is \$39.21 per hour; the state minimum wage as of January 1, 2026, is \$16.00 per hour. This gap of over \$23 per hour—more than \$48,000 annually before taxes—illustrates why employed residents still struggle to afford healthy food. Housing instability, transportation barriers, and the inability to afford healthy food are all manifestations of the same root cause: household incomes that do not meet the true cost of living.

Stakeholders consistently noted that emergency food and benefit programs are “band-aids” rather than solutions—necessary for immediate relief, but insufficient for long-term change.

While food-specific interventions are essential, they cannot fully resolve food insecurity without acknowledging this underlying reality. Issues such as living wages, income supports, and employer practices are upstream factors that directly impact household food budgets. Addressing these factors falls outside the traditional scope of food council work, but the Food Council can play a role by building coalitions with economic development entities, workforce development boards, and community organizations already engaged in economic justice advocacy.

The following recommendations address critical access points where the Food Council can take action, while recognizing that each is connected to the broader challenge of economic insecurity:

Housing and Transportation Access:

- Prioritize policy action and funding for more affordable housing, as housing instability is a primary driver of food insecurity that affects food storage and preparation.
- Invest in better transportation options for both rural and urban areas to overcome the logistical and physical burdens of grocery access.

Benefit Access and Economic Relief:

- Advocate for policies that support increasing SNAP or other food benefits to bridge the affordability gap and provide economic relief for ALICE households—families who are employed but whose wages do not stretch far enough to cover basic needs like food, housing, and transportation. These households often fall through the gaps, earning too much to qualify for benefits but too little to achieve stability.
- Pursue SNAP Administrative Advocacy at the local level, working with DSS to ensure adequate staffing and efficient application processing so that eligible residents can access benefits without unnecessary delays.
- Explore opportunities for cross-sector collaboration with economic development and workforce partners to connect food security advocacy with broader efforts to improve economic stability for working families.

Integrated Service Delivery:

- Promote and fund integrated “hub” models that co-locate essential services (food, healthcare, childcare) to reduce bureaucratic silos and combat “resource overload” and navigation fatigue for vulnerable families.

Support Local, Healthy Food Supply:

- Enact policies that provide strong support for local farms and food businesses to increase the physical availability and affordability of fresh, nutrient-dense foods within the community.

5. Strategic Development for Small Farms and Regional Supply Chains

5.1 Data Sources and Methodology

The findings presented in this section are synthesized from two primary data streams: qualitative focus group summaries with emergency food providers and community stakeholders across Broome and Tioga counties, and a quantitative community survey. These datasets highlight a critical intersection between high community demand for local agriculture and the systemic barriers that impede its expansion, particularly within the regional supply chain.

5.2 Community Prioritization of Local Agriculture

Quantitative data indicate that strengthening the local agricultural sector is a top priority for residents. When asked to identify policy changes that would most improve the food system, respondents ranked “Support for local farms and food businesses” as the single most-cited policy change (34 mentions).

This desire for local agricultural development is further reflected in consumer habits such as price expectations, direct-to-consumer models, barriers for low-income consumers, and post-pandemic shifts. When identifying solutions to make locally grown food more accessible, the most popular suggestion was the creation of “More farm stands or markets” (28 mentions). This outpaced other logistical solutions, suggesting that the physical presence of small farms and direct-to-consumer outlets is a cornerstone of the community’s vision for food security.

It is worth considering whether the community’s desire for “more farm stands or markets” reflects a need for new locations or a lack of awareness about existing options. Strengthening consumer education and marketing about current farm stands, farmers’ markets, and local food purchasing opportunities may be as important as creating new outlets. A dual approach—improving visibility of existing resources while strategically expanding to underserved areas—would maximize impact while supporting the viability of current operations.

5.3 Balancing Viability with Affordability

While the demand for local farm products is high, the data reveals a tension between farm viability and consumer purchasing power.

- **The Cost Barrier:** The second most common suggestion for improving access was “Lower prices” (24 mentions). This aligns with focus group findings, in which participants described a food system under “immense strain,” driven largely by benefit reductions and rising costs.
- **Physical Access:** Survey respondents highlighted “Transportation or distance to stores” as a top challenge. This suggests that farmland development strategies must consider proximity to population centers; simply increasing production is insufficient if “more locations in [the] neighborhood” are not established.

Reconciling the Tension: The community’s simultaneous desire for lower prices and support for local farms presents a genuine challenge. Asking small farms to lower prices without additional support would threaten their viability—farmers already face significant economic headwinds, including high property taxes, labor shortages, and rising input costs. Rather than placing the burden of affordability on producers, this tension points toward systemic solutions:

- Subsidy and incentive programs that offset costs for farmers participating in nutrition programs (such as SNAP/EBT at farmers’ markets or farm-to-food-bank initiatives), allowing them to offer accessible prices without absorbing the full cost
- Institutional purchasing commitments from schools, hospitals, and government agencies that provide farms with stable revenue, enabling them to offer competitive pricing to individual consumers
- Consumer education that helps residents understand the true cost of local food production and the value of supporting the local agricultural economy

The goal is not to reduce what farmers earn, but to make local food more accessible through mechanisms that support both consumers and producers

5.4 Regional Interdependency

The Tioga-Broome Supply Chain: A critical finding from the focus groups is the deep structural reliance between Tioga and Broome counties. Participants described a symbiotic yet fragile relationship in which Tioga County often serves as the agricultural production base for Broome County’s more urbanized population centers.

- **Production vs. Processing:** Focus groups noted that while Tioga County holds significant “cropland and pasture” assets necessary for large-scale produce generation, it often lacks the commercial processing and distribution infrastructure found in Broome. This creates a supply chain gap where raw product cannot easily reach the emergency food network without crossing county lines.
- **Logistical Bottlenecks:** The connection between these two counties is currently maintained through ad-hoc solutions. Participants highlighted that “transportation needs”

are often met by volunteer drivers or “farm partners” personally delivering recovery food to hubs in Binghamton. This informal network is strained by the “lead times” and “volunteer burnout” cited in the focus groups.

- **Shared Organizational Oversight:** Successful interventions have required cross-county collaboration. Programs like the “Broome-Tioga Mobility Management Project” were cited as essential frameworks for bridging this gap, allowing for a more unified approach to food access that treats the two counties as a single “foodshed” rather than separate jurisdictions.

5.5 The Role of Farms in Food Recovery and System Resilience

Focus group participants described a food system that relies heavily on short-term solutions, yet local farms serve as essential pillars within that fragile infrastructure.

- **Reliance on Recovery:** Food recovery organizations reported significant reliance on recovered food to meet community demand. One representative noted that up to 80% of the food they distribute comes from recovery sources, specifically citing “farm partners” alongside retail and grocery stores. As noted in Section 3, this figure may reflect the specific operations of food recovery organizations like CHOW and affiliated partners rather than the broader emergency food network, which also sources food through FBST and direct purchasing.
- **Incentivizing Participation:** Survey respondents identified “Incentives for donating food” (28 mentions) and “Policies that support donating food” (35 mentions) as top priorities, signaling strong community support for mechanisms that enable small farms to contribute to the emergency food system while remaining financially solvent. This priority was shared broadly across stakeholder types—including community members, nonprofit organizations, and emergency food providers—suggesting community-wide consensus rather than interest from any single group. Some incentives already exist—the NYS Farm Donations to Food Pantries Tax Credit, for example—yet awareness among farmers appears limited. Strengthening the farm-to-food-bank pipeline may require both increasing outreach about existing programs and advocating for expanded or enhanced incentives that make participation more accessible for small and mid-sized operations.

Critical Need for Food Recovery Organizations: While FBST provides significant quantities of produce to partner agencies throughout the region, food recovery organizations like CHOW and Good Neighbors have a distinct and critical need for fresh produce donations from local farms. These organizations operate differently from the food bank model and rely heavily on recovered food to serve the community. Strengthening the connection between local farms and these food recovery organizations specifically is a key opportunity.

5.6 Structural and Environmental Challenges

Throughout the engagement process, conversation frequently extended beyond immediate market dynamics to the foundational threats facing local agriculture. Participants articulated a broad concern for the future sustainability of agriculture in Broome County, driven by changing land use patterns, regulatory inconsistencies, and environmental uncertainty.

Land Use and Access: A primary concern cited by stakeholders is the shrinking access to viable farmland. Participants described increased competition for land from non-agricultural developments, specifically noting the pressure from housing expansion and renewable energy projects.

- **Competing Uses:** The difficulty in acquiring and maintaining productive agricultural land is exacerbated by solar and wind projects that compete for the same acreage.
- **Stakeholder Sentiment:** As one participant summarized, “Land is getting harder to come by—solar and housing eat up the best soil.”

Zoning and Regulatory Barriers: Discussions revealed significant friction between agricultural operations and municipal zoning regulations. Participants highlighted that support for agriculture varies drastically by region, with some municipalities creating unintentional hurdles due to a lack of awareness.

- **Educational Gap:** There is a perceived need to educate local officials on how zoning impacts farm viability. One stakeholder noted, “Some boards don’t even realize ag is in their backyard, let alone how regulations can help or hurt it.”
- **Jurisdictional Tension:** Concerns were also raised regarding the balance of power between local boards and state mandates, particularly regarding energy infrastructure. As one participant observed, “The state can override the town board’s approval if it’s a big enough solar project.”

Climate Resilience: The operational challenges of farming are being compounded by unpredictable and shifting weather patterns. Participants cited specific threats including drought, flooding, and shifting seasons that disrupt traditional planting and harvesting cycles.

- **Operational Threat:** Beyond weather events, stakeholders expressed concern regarding water management, well quality, and new pest pressures driven by climate change.
- **Adaptation:** There is a strong desire for strategies and education to help producers adapt to this uncertainty. One farmer described the new reality: “The weather just doesn’t follow the old rules anymore; you get floods or nothing, drought or sudden snow.”
- **Future Outlook:** Acknowledging the magnitude of the challenge, another participant remarked, “We’re going to have to educate ourselves on how to try to contain that force, which is going to be difficult.”

5.7 Strategic Recommendations

Recommendations for strengthening the local agricultural sector and its role in regional food security should focus on supply chain resilience and producer viability:

1. **Regional Logistics Support:** Establish formal, dedicated **transportation corridors and distribution infrastructure** to efficiently move Tioga-produced food to Broome distribution hubs, reducing reliance on informal networks and volunteer labor.
2. **Direct Support Policies:** Enact and fund community-requested **support for local farms and food businesses** to improve operational sustainability and address headwinds such as

high property taxes. Existing programs such as the NYS Agricultural Assessment and NYS School Tax Credit provide some relief, though income and acreage requirements may limit accessibility for smaller operations. The Food Council may consider advocating at the state level for adjusted thresholds that better serve small and emerging farms.

3. **Integration with Safety Nets:** Develop structured **incentives for donating food** that financially compensate small producers for contributing to the emergency food system, thereby addressing the critical need for fresh produce at food recovery organizations like CHOW and Good Neighbors. At the federal level, the Local Farmers Feeding our Communities Act—cosponsored by Congressman Josh Riley—would codify and expand local food purchasing programs; supporting this legislation aligns with the community’s expressed priorities.
4. **Market Access Expansion:** Encourage and invest in the creation of **more farm stands or markets** to meet high consumer demand for direct-to-consumer local purchasing. Pair new development with enhanced consumer education and marketing efforts to improve visibility of existing local food outlets, ensuring that current farms benefit from increased awareness before resources are directed toward new locations.

6. Broome County Food Council Action Plan

Expansion: Systemic and Prioritized Recommendations

The Comprehensive Food System Assessment confirms that food insecurity in the region is a systemic problem driven by structural barriers, not a simple lack of food. The Broome County Food Council has already made significant progress in breaking down organizational silos and fostering inclusive collaboration across sectors. Building on this foundation, the Council is now expanding toward a regional focus that treats the Broome and Tioga County areas as a single, interdependent foodshed.

Defining the Foodshed: A foodshed is the geographic region that produces and supplies food to a particular population, analogous to a watershed. For the purposes of this plan, the Broome-Tioga foodshed encompasses the agricultural production, processing, distribution, and consumption systems that connect these two counties. This regional lens recognizes that Tioga County’s farmland and Broome County’s population centers are interdependent: food security in one county cannot be addressed in isolation from the other. The Food Council may consider benchmarking this foodshed approach against other regional food system initiatives to identify best practices and partnership opportunities.

A Note on Scope and Prioritization: The recommendations that follow are comprehensive by design—they reflect the full range of community input and systemic needs identified through this assessment. However, the Food Council cannot address everything at once. As one stakeholder wisely noted, “we can’t boil the ocean.” The priority designations (High, Medium, Low) are intended to help the Council sequence its work, focusing first on foundational actions while building toward longer-term systemic change. The Council should regularly revisit these priorities as capacity and circumstances evolve.

The following recommendations for each working group are prioritized along a continuum from immediate Emergency Response to foundational Systemic Change, with explicit action on the root causes of food insecurity: housing, transportation, and economic stability. As this assessment has shown, food insecurity in this region is fundamentally tied to economic insecurity—when household incomes do not cover the true cost of living, housing, transportation, and food, budgets for all suffer. The recommendations below focus on areas where the Food Council can take direct action, while recognizing that lasting change will also require partnership with those working on broader economic stability.

6.1 Advocacy and Public Policy Work Group

Focus: This group will drive the systemic change needed to address the root causes of food insecurity, primarily through policy and financial reform. The Community Survey and Focus Groups clearly indicate that food insecurity is a problem of affordability and systemic structure: “Cost of food” was the second most cited barrier (34 mentions), and there is a critical need for economic relief for the the ALICE demographic who earn too much for benefits but cannot afford a nutritious diet. Furthermore, the community’s top-ranked solution for waste was

“Policies that support donating food” (35 mentions), demonstrating a strong mandate for policy-based change over individual action.

Priority	Recommendation	Continuum Focus	Issue Area
High ▾	Develop a Framework for Incentives: Finalize the legal/financial framework for structured incentives to donate food and compensate small producers for contributing to the emergency food system.	Systemic Change (Farm Viability)	Economic Security, Farm Viability
High ▾	Elevate Housing Policy: Finalize the Council’s Policy Priorities to formally include more affordable housing as a primary food security strategy.	Systemic Change (Policy)	Housing, Economic Security
Med ▾	Policy Advocacy Blitz: Coordinate a legislative blitz (local, county, state) to secure funding and legislative support for the top three priorities (Housing, Transportation, Farm Support).	Systemic Change (Political Will)	Multi-Issue Advocacy
Med ▾	Secure Benefit Increases: Actively advocate for and support the implementation of policies that support increasing SNAP/other food benefits to bridge the affordability gap for ALICE households—the 25% of Broome County and 27% of Tioga County households that earn too much for benefits but too little for stability.	Emergency Response → Systemic Change	Economic Security, Benefits

Longer-Term Horizon - Reducing the Need: As outlined in Section 4, food insecurity in this region is fundamentally an economic problem. Beyond immediate policy wins, this work group should explore opportunities to align food security advocacy with broader economic stability efforts. Building coalitions with workforce development boards, economic development entities, and community organizations engaged in living-wage advocacy, income-support programs such as universal basic income, and other economic-stability efforts positions the Council to address the root causes that drive families to need emergency food assistance in the first place. The

ultimate goal is not just to improve the emergency food system, but to reduce the number of households that rely on it.

6.2 Transportation Work Group

Focus: This group will be responsible for the logistical infrastructure needed to move food from people to people and from people to food across the regional foodshed. The assessment found that “Transportation or distance to stores” was the single most reported challenge to food access (37 mentions). Stakeholder insights highlighted the logistical disparity: Tioga residents face a “distance penalty” and lack of rural public transit, while urban residents face the physical burden of carrying groceries on public transit. For food recovery, the lack of reliable transport is a significant operational barrier, identified by 19 survey respondents as a crucial need.

Priority	Recommendation	Continuum Focus	Issue Area
High ▾	Formalize Broome-Tioga Logistics: Establish formal, dedicated transportation corridors and distribution infrastructure (e.g., MOUs with partners) to efficiently move Tioga-produced food to Broome distribution hubs.	Systemic Change (Infrastructure)	Transportation, Regional Foodshed
Med ▾	Pilot Rural Transit/Delivery: Launch a pilot program for subsidized delivery options or rural transit in the most isolated Tioga County areas to address the “distance penalty.”	Emergency Response → Systemic Change	Transportation
Med ▾	Improve Urban Transit Access: Work with transit authorities to address the physical burden of carrying groceries on public transit and implement changes to ease access.	Systemic Change (Accessibility)	Transportation
Med ▾	Address Cold Storage Gaps: Develop and fund programs to improve transportation and delivery options for food recovery logistics, including mobile cold storage capacity, which frontline groups lack.	Emergency Response (Capacity)	Transportation, Emergency Food System

6.3 Underserved Populations Work Group

Focus: This group will develop and implement solutions in targeted geographic areas (including the new emphasis on Tioga County) and for the most vulnerable populations, addressing physical access and service delivery gaps. The Community Survey confirmed that Broome County’s primary barriers are economic and logistical, with “Cost of food” and “Transportation” tied as the single biggest challenges (25 mentions each). Furthermore, focus groups described the nutritional environment as a “food swamp” (overwhelmed by unhealthy options), and the community identified Restaurants (41 mentions) and Grocery Stores (37 mentions) as the primary sources of food waste, indicating a clear need for systemic recovery solutions in high-density areas.

Priority	Recommendation	Continuum Focus	Issue Area
High ▾	Launch Integrated “Hub” Models: Secure sites and funding to pilot one or two integrated “hub” models that co-locate essential services (food, healthcare, childcare) to combat “resource overload” and navigation fatigue.	Systemic Change (Service Delivery)	Service Integration, Healthcare, Childcare
Med ▾	Develop Tioga Processing/Co-op: Conduct a feasibility study and launch local processing or co-op grocery structures in Tioga County to mitigate “market leakage” and link producers to local consumers.	Systemic Change (Infrastructure)	Local Food Economy
Med ▾	Expand Market Access: Open new farm stands or markets in targeted Broome County neighborhoods to combat the “food swamp” environment and increase access to fresh produce.	Emergency Response → Systemic Change	Food Access, Public Health
Low ▾	Formalize Cross-County Networks: Initiate formal cross-county collaboration meetings with Tioga County service providers to build the human infrastructure necessary for the regional foodshed model.	Systemic Change (Organizational)	Regional Foodshed

6.4 Families with Young Children Work Group

Focus: This group's core mission is to increase food access and nutrition resources within early childcare programs, ensuring that early childhood needs and nutrition resources are a key component of the new integrated service model. This is critical, as Broome County census tracts have been identified as childcare deserts, and Focus Groups highlighted specific youth risks related to obesity and poor nutrition during out-of-school hours, underscoring the need for systemic support in early care settings.

Priority	Recommendation	Continuum Focus	Issue Area
High ▾	Prioritize Childcare in Hub Models: Collaborate with the Underserved Work Group to ensure the needs of the early childhood community are prioritized in the feasibility study for the integrated "hub" models.	Systemic Change (Service Delivery)	Childcare, Service Integration
Med ▾	Resource Distribution & Capacity Building: Distribute targeted resources to support food access at childcare sites and build sites' capacity to offer food access and nutrition services in Broome County.	Emergency Response (Direct Service)	Public Health, Nutrition
Med ▾	Advocate for Childcare Funding: Collaborate with the Advocacy Work Group to advocate for policies and funding sources that support early childcare and its nutritional component.	Systemic Change (Policy)	Childcare, Policy

6.5 Marketing and Communication Work Group

We have revised the Marketing and Communication Work Group (Section 6.5) of the Food Access Plan Expansion to incorporate the key strategic recommendations from the Hunger Education section (Section 2), focusing on combating stigma, simplifying access to resources, and promoting practical education.

Focus: This group is essential for translating the plan’s vision into public action, ensuring community awareness and engagement for all systemic and regional initiatives. Focus groups noted the current system is often hindered by “resource overload” and navigation fatigue due to too many uncoordinated lists/maps, and the Hunger Education section highlighted the critical need to combat stigma and the “Understanding Gap” about food insecurity. The work group must combat this by clearly communicating the complex policy and logistical changes and by ensuring outreach methods go beyond the internet/social media to effectively reach underserved populations.

Priority	Recommendation	Continuum Focus	Issue Area
High ▾	Execute Policy Campaigns: Develop and execute targeted public education and outreach campaigns for new programs, especially to increase SNAP/other food benefits and secure more affordable housing policy.	Systemic Change (Public Mobilization)	Policy, Housing, Benefits
High ▾	Bridge the Empathy Gap and Combat Stigma: Implement a “Shadow Day” program and develop a narrative grounded in lived experience, along with respectful video reels, to normalize assistance programs and demystify the pantry, directly addressing the stigma and “Understanding Gap” in the community.	Systemic Change (Cultural/Social)	Stigma, Public Understanding
Med ▾	Centralize and Simplify Communication: Rather than creating a new resource, evaluate and strengthen existing tools, such as the Food Access Map. Identify gaps in current resources and determine whether updates, improved promotion, or consolidation of existing lists would better serve the community than launching a new platform. Any	Emergency Response → Systemic Change	Communication, Navigation

	unified information hub should be designed with input from end users to avoid adding to “resource overload.” Ensure dissemination through all non-digital channels (faith communities, schools) to reach populations with limited internet access.		
Med ▾	Focus Education on Practical Utility: Launch public education campaigns that specifically clarify “Best By” vs. “Expiration” dates to reduce food waste, and ensure that educational programming (e.g., cooking classes) is always paired with direct resource provision (Resource-First Approach).	Emergency Response (Capacity)	Public Health, Nutrition, Food Waste
Med ▾	Regional Narrative: Develop a cohesive communications strategy that clearly explains the shift to a regional Broome-Tioga foodshed model and the shared benefits of the systemic approach.	Systemic Change (Organizational Alignment)	Regional Foodshed
Low ▾	Impact Storytelling: Assist Advocacy and Underserved Work Groups in compiling qualitative stories and data to build a narrative around ALICE and the need for policy change.	Systemic Change (Political Will)	Advocacy, Policy

Balancing Digital and Non-Digital Outreach: The assessment revealed a tension in community preferences—some respondents called for “apps or technology” to connect people with food resources, while others emphasized the importance of non-digital channels for populations with limited internet access or digital literacy. The work group should pursue a both/and approach: leveraging technology where it adds efficiency while maintaining robust non-digital outreach through faith communities, schools, senior centers, and other trusted community touchpoints. No single communication channel will reach everyone; a diversified strategy is essential.

6.6 Steering Committee (Leadership)

Focus: The Steering Committee is responsible for the overall strategic direction, securing funding, and maintaining the structural integrity of the regional effort. The committee must now act on the critical finding of regional interdependency, leading the transition toward a unified approach that treats the two counties as a single, formal “foodshed” based on the mixed-methods assessment data.

Priority	Recommendation	Continuum Focus	Issue Area
High ▾	Formalize Regional Governance: Finalize the formal operating structure for sustained cross-county collaboration and governance that officially treats Broome and Tioga as a single Foodshed for grant and operational purposes.	Systemic Change (Organizational)	Regional Foodshed, Governance
High ▾	Secure Major Systemic Funding: Lead efforts to secure major grant funding to support the highly resource-intensive systemic recommendations, including the integrated “hub” models and the formalized transportation corridors.	Systemic Change (Sustainability)	Funding, Sustainability
Med ▾	Executive Advocacy: Ensure Food Council Representatives meet with local, county, state, and federal officials to introduce and lobby for the regional foodshed vision and its policy priorities.	Systemic Change (Political Will)	Policy, Advocacy

Identifying Organizational Responsibility: As the Council moves from planning to implementation, each recommendation should be connected to specific organizations or partners who can take ownership. The Steering Committee should lead an exercise to map recommendations to responsible parties—identifying which organizations have the capacity, relationships, and mandate to advance each priority. This ensures accountability and helps identify gaps where new partnerships may be needed.

7. Tioga County: Community and Stakeholder Experiences

Expanding the scope of the Food Action Plan to include Tioga County reflects a critical shift toward a regional perspective on food systems. Administrative boundaries rarely define how food is grown, distributed, or accessed; by incorporating Tioga County, this assessment acknowledges that the “foodshed” is interconnected, linking rural production areas with broader regional consumption and distribution networks. This regional lens reveals how shared challenges—such as economic volatility and infrastructure gaps—manifest differently across rural and semi-urban contexts, offering a more complete picture of the ecosystem in which Broome County operates.

7.1. The “Rural Penalty”: Transportation and Geographic Isolation

For Tioga County residents, physical access to food is inextricably linked to transportation infrastructure. Unlike urban centers where proximity might be the primary issue, Tioga residents face a “distance penalty” compounded by a severe lack of public transit options.

- **Distance as a Primary Barrier:** Survey respondents and focus group participants consistently identified the distance to stores as a top challenge. One community member explicitly noted the “distance to major sources of a variety of fresh food” as a significant barrier to access.
- **Infrastructure Gaps:** The lack of delivery options and public transit creates inequities for vulnerable populations. A stakeholder noted that while there are pantries in the western end of the county, “lack of transportation is a big problem.” They explained that despite requests for meal deliveries, they “simply can’t provide that” due to logistical constraints.
- **Isolation of Producers:** This isolation extends to farmers, who reported feeling “on my own as far as making connections.” Participants described having to “bootstrap it pretty much on my own” due to a lack of meaningful local networks.

7.2. Economic Strain and Rising Demand

Both individuals and organizations in Tioga County report being under intense financial pressure. According to the [2025 New York State Community Action Association Poverty Report](#), 12.2% of Tioga County residents live in poverty and another 27% are ALICE households—meaning nearly 40% of all households struggle to afford basic necessities. The living wage for a single adult with one child is \$40.28 per hour, while the state minimum wage is \$16.00—a gap of over \$24 per hour. The cost of living crisis, exacerbated by recent policy shifts, has increased reliance on emergency food systems while straining the organizations that provide them.

- **Cost of Food:** Across the board, the “Cost of food” was cited as a primary challenge for households and organizations alike. With a median income of \$47,582—and just \$41,096

for those with only a high school diploma—many working families cannot stretch their earnings to cover both rent and groceries.

- **Impact of Policy Changes:** Benefit reductions have had immediate consequences. One organization highlighted that typical holiday stress is now “mightily amplified by uncertainty of SNAP, HEAP, [and] high cost of food.” They described government leaders as “unresponsive, uncaring” to these realities.
- **Organizational Funding Struggles:** Support organizations are struggling to maintain capacity. One organization noted difficulties securing grants because they are “not primarily dealing with food [insecurity],” despite the need’s intersectional nature. Similarly, another organization reported a critical need for “more staff, time, money” to handle the high demand.

7.3. The Agricultural Disconnect: Land Rich, Market Poor

Tioga County is characterized by its “rural character” and “access to open land.” However, local farmers struggle to connect with local consumers due to significant economic and structural barriers.

- **Economic Viability:** Farmers face significant headwinds, including “massive taxes, especially property tax” and labor shortages. One focus group participant noted that while there are no legal barriers to agriculture, there is also “no economic support” and it is “not a priority for the legislature.”
- **Market Leakage:** A critical finding is that most sales are direct-to-consumer but often occur *outside* the county. As one participant stated, *“Most of the people producing food here find the majority of their sales are actually outside of the county.”* This forces farmers to seek markets in neighboring regions to remain viable.
- **Desire for Local Systems:** There is a clear desire to localize the food system. One participant expressed a specific wish for “a co-op grocery store that prioritizes fresh fruits and veggies from local farmers.” However, current infrastructure remains fragmented, with minimal formal collaboration between Tioga and neighboring counties.

7.4. Resilience and Community Action

Despite these structural challenges, the data highlights a strong undercurrent of community resilience and a willingness to collaborate across the region.

- **Local Strengths:** The community’s “rural character” and “local interest in food justice” were identified as key assets. The transition of some farms from dairy to beef production was noted as an example of an “evolving strength” as farmers adapt to market changes.
- **Volunteer Reliance:** The emergency food system is heavily powered by volunteers, yet this reliance is becoming a vulnerability. Organizations noted that volunteers are “limited in this economy just like everyone else” and that finding reliable help is increasingly difficult.

- **Collaborative Potential:** There is consensus interest in community-led discussions, though skepticism remains about the capacity to sustain a formal food council due to “time and money” constraints.

7.5. Summary of Key Needs and Actionable Priorities for Tioga County

The economic data underscores the urgency of these challenges: 16.7% of children in Tioga County live in poverty, and 38.6% of female-headed households with children live below the poverty line. These figures, while lower than Broome County’s, still represent significant hardship in a rural community with fewer resources and services. To overcome the “rural penalty” and agricultural disconnect, the Food Action Plan should focus on the following key priorities:

1. **Transportation Solutions:** Make targeted investments in **delivery options or rural transit** to bridge the severe geographic isolation and lack of public transportation that prevent access to food sources.
2. **Economic Support for Agriculture:** Pursue policy changes that offer direct **economic support for farmers**, focusing specifically on alleviating the burden of massive property taxes and addressing labor shortages.
3. **Infrastructure Development:** Facilitate the creation of **local processing or co-op grocery structures** that prioritize purchasing fresh, local food, thereby helping to keep Tioga-grown products within the county and mitigating “market leakage.”
4. **Local Network Building:** Provide support and resources to foster formal, sustained **cross-county collaboration** to create meaningful local networks for producers who currently feel isolated.

8. Survey Metrics Overview

The community survey was distributed directly to community members and stakeholders across Broome and Tioga counties to gauge the local food system's strengths and challenges. The effort captured a diverse cross-section of voices. Participation showed a higher concentration in the urban center, with **30 respondents** reporting that they live or work in Broome County and **26 respondents** in Tioga County. Additionally within these respondent counts, there were **5 respondents** that stated living and/or working in both counties. Respondents were then asked to answer questions generally regarding their experiences in their respective community or communities.

The respondent pool was heavily composed of active stakeholders, with “Community Members” and “Community/Nonprofit Organizations” being the most common roles, followed closely by “Emergency Food Providers”.

8.1 Broome County Analysis

The **30 respondents** from Broome County included community members (**16**), nonprofit organizations (**16**), and emergency food providers (**13**). Overall, they rated the current state of food access as 2.7 out of 5, signaling significant room for improvement.

The primary barriers identified were economic and logistical, with “Cost of food” and “Transportation or distance to stores” tied as the single biggest challenges, each cited by **25** respondents. Broome County's results uniquely highlighted the intersection of food and housing insecurity; unlike Tioga, “More affordable housing” emerged as the top policy priority (**22**), surpassing even food-specific policies.

Regarding food waste, respondents identified restaurants (**26**) and grocery stores (**22**) as the primary sources. To address this, they favored systemic solutions, such as “Policies that support donating food” (**20**), and technological innovations, such as “Apps or technology to connect extra food with people who need it” (**16**). Finally, for local food consumption, the main barrier was financial, with **17** respondents indicating that “Lower prices” would be the most effective enabler for buying local.

8.2 Tioga County Analysis

The **26 respondents** from Tioga County leaned toward the nonprofit sector, with **8** representing community or nonprofit organizations and **4** community members. Similar to Broome, the average food access rating was low. However, the specific challenges reported were distinctly rural in nature. “Transportation or distance to stores” was the clear top challenge (**12**), outpacing “Cost of food” (**9**). Additionally, “Limited fresh or healthy food” (**6**) was a noted concern, suggesting physical availability is as much of an issue as affordability.

Policy priorities reflected these logistical hurdles, with “Better transportation options” (**11**) being the most selected, followed closely by “Support for local farms and food businesses” (**10**). Regarding food waste, respondents reported it occurring significantly at restaurants (**12**) and grocery stores (**11**), and they strongly preferred programmatic solutions, specifically “More food

recovery programs” (12). Unlike Broome, where price was the main barrier to buying local, Tioga residents indicated that “More farm stands or markets” (9) and “Better advertising or information” (6) were the key to increasing local consumption.

8.3 Synthesis: Urban vs. Rural Dynamics

A comparison of the two counties reveals a clear divergence in needs driven by their geographic landscapes. **Broome County** respondents painted a picture of economic strain, where high costs and housing instability are the primary drivers of food insecurity. Their solutions favored structural economic support (affordable housing) and efficiency-driven waste solutions (apps).

In contrast, **Tioga County** respondents described a landscape defined by physical isolation, where the lack of transportation and limited retail locations prevent access to healthy food. Consequently, their priorities focused on infrastructure (transportation, more farm stands) and community programming (recovery programs).

Despite these differences, both counties shared a remarkably similar, below-average assessment of the current food system and a unified desire for policies that support local farms and increase food benefits.

9. Community & Agriculture Resilience Audit Tool (CARAT) Assessment: Broome-Tioga Regional Foodshed

Introduction

This CARAT assessment evaluates the resilience, equity, and sustainability of the Broome-Tioga regional foodshed across seven core themes established by the North American Food Systems Network. The assessment integrates data from farmer interviews, community surveys (51 respondents), stakeholder focus groups, emergency food system analysis, and planning documentation to identify strengths, gaps, and funding-aligned priorities for the Food Action Plan.

Methodology Note: This assessment evaluates resilience across CARAT’s seven core themes using synthesized indicators. A more granular assessment of all 101 CARAT indicators could be conducted in future planning cycles. Scores reflect regional conditions and may mask significant local variation—notably, poverty rates in the City of Binghamton (32.9%) exceed the Broome County average (18.9%).

Scoring Scale (1–5):

- 1 = Not present/significant gaps
- 2 = Being considered; advocacy present, but no formal implementation
- 3 = Emerging or uneven implementation; adopted but inconsistently resourced
- 4 = In place with sufficient resources and demonstrable results
- 5 = Strong, coordinated, and equitable system

Assessment conducted using the [CARAT framework \(Version 2025\)](#) developed by the North American Food Systems Network.

Theme 1: Natural Resource Management, Use, & Conservation

Overall Finding: Stewardship practices are present at the farm level, but policy alignment, incentives, and infrastructure are inconsistent, limiting region-wide resilience.

See also: Section 5 (Farmland & Small Farm Development) and Hindlewood Farm Case Study

Indicator	Score	Summary Assessment	Priority Actions
Farmland protection from non-farm development	2	Farmland is abundant, but easements, zoning protections, and loss tracking are limited or undocumented. Stakeholders noted competition from solar/wind projects and housing expansion.	Fund farmland protection planning, conservation easements, and ag-friendly zoning
Land access for beginning farmers	2	Farmers report major barriers; no formal land-matching or succession system exists. Hindlewood Farm case study documents self-directed land search with no institutional support.	Invest in land-link programs, succession planning, and acquisition grants
Soil health & conservation practices	3	Practices exist (rotational grazing, cover crops, composting, documented in case study), but cost-share and technical access vary widely. NRCS applications face delays.	Expand NRCS matching funds and regenerative transition support
Food waste diversion (residential/commercial)	3	CHOW's Broome Bounty is one of the most robust food recovery programs in NYS. However, system sustainability is uncertain—reliance on retail surplus may diminish as businesses optimize inventory. Cold storage and volunteer capacity constrain growth.	Capital funding for cold storage, transport, and paid recovery staff; address sustainability risks

Agricultural waste diversion & gleaning	3	Gleaning occurs, but infrastructure limits scale. Limited documentation in stakeholder data.	Fund gleaning coordination and compost infrastructure
Renewable energy on farms	2	Interest exists; cost is the primary barrier. Hindlewood Farm case study notes ~25-year payback period deterred adoption.	Capital grants and tax incentives for on-farm solar
Climate-smart agriculture & adaptation	2	Awareness present; implementation limited. Farmers report drought extending pasture rest periods and shortening grazing seasons.	Fund resilience pilots, high tunnels, and drainage improvements

Theme 2: Community Health & Well-Being

Overall Finding: Food exists in the region, but cost, transportation, and benefit instability undermine consistent access to nutritious, culturally appropriate food. The environment is characterized as a “food swamp” rather than a food desert.

See also: Section 4 (Public Health & Nutrition)

Indicator	Score	Summary Assessment	Priority Actions
Access to nutritious, affordable food	3	“Food swamp” conditions persist—inexpensive, unhealthy processed options are more available than fresh food. Survey respondents rated food access at 2.6/5. “Cost of food” cited 34 times as a barrier.	Subsidize healthy retail and culturally relevant food access
Transportation to food outlets	2	Most cited barrier across all surveys (37 mentions). In Tioga County, the lack of rural transit creates a “distance penalty.” In urban Broome, the physical burden of carrying groceries on transit discourages healthy purchasing.	Invest in mobile markets, delivery, and transit subsidies
SNAP/WIC utilization	3	Programs exist; benefit cuts and administrative delays reduce impact. 22 survey respondents cited “SNAP/benefit cuts or delays” as a challenge. DSS staffing constraints slow application processing.	Fund benefits navigation and enrollment support; pursue SNAP Administrative Advocacy
Emergency food system capacity	3	Highly functional but fragile. System constrained by aging volunteers (average age over 75), limited cold storage, and transportation gaps. FBST distributed 1.4M+ pounds of fresh produce in Broome County (2024). Food recovery organizations report up to 80% of distribution from recovery sources, though this varies by organization type.	Shift funding toward dignity-centered, fresh food sourcing; address volunteer pipeline

Integration with housing & healthcare	2	Root causes clearly identified; coordination limited. The survey ranked “More affordable housing” as the top policy priority in Broome County (22 mentions). Housing instability is identified as the primary driver of health disparities.	Fund food-housing-health hub pilots
---------------------------------------	---	---	-------------------------------------

Key Statistics:

- 44% of Broome County households live below the ALICE threshold (18.9% poverty + 25% ALICE)
- 40% of Tioga County households live below the ALICE threshold (12.2% poverty + 27% ALICE)
- Living wage gap: \$23+/hour (for 1 adult with 1 child vs. minimum wage)
- Child poverty in the City of Binghamton: 41.6%

Theme 3: Community Self-Reliance in Food

Overall Finding: Local food production is significant, but processing, distribution, and regulatory barriers prevent stronger self-reliance. Much food produced locally—especially in Tioga County—leaves the region.

See also: Section 5 (Farmland & Small Farm Development) and Section 7 (Tioga County)

Indicator	Score	Summary Assessment	Priority Actions
Local food production for local consumption	3	Much food produced locally leaves the region due to weak local markets. One Tioga stakeholder: <i>“Most of the people producing food here find the majority of their sales are actually outside of the county.”</i>	Invest in aggregation and local markets
Small-scale processing & cottage food	2	Infrastructure and regulatory barriers persist. Regional organic certifier not accepting new animal operations. Processing depends on external facilities.	Fund shared kitchens and permitting reform
Community & household food growing	3	Interest strong; scale insufficient. Community gardens and backyard production documented but not systematically supported.	Grants for gardens, tools, and water access
Supply chain resilience	2	Dependence on external systems remains high. Lead times on ordered products have doubled (sometimes to two months). Informal volunteer networks currently bridge gaps in the Tioga-Broome supply chain.	Fund storage, distribution, and contingency planning

Theme 4: Distributive & Democratic Leadership

Overall Finding: Collaboration exists, but decision-making power and accessibility remain uneven, especially for people with lived experience of food insecurity.

See also: Section 2 (Hunger Education) and Section 6 (Food Access Plan Expansion)

Indicator	Score	Summary Assessment	Priority Actions
Leadership development	2	Need identified; few formal pipelines exist. Beginning farmers report being “mostly self-taught” and receiving limited support from support systems.	Fund paid fellowships and leadership navigators
Food policy council accessibility	2	Meetings exist; accessibility not assured. 30 of 51 survey respondents were engaged with the Food Council; 21 were not, suggesting outreach gaps.	Support stipends, childcare, translation, virtual access
Inclusion of lived experience	2	Engagement occurs; power-sharing limited. Focus groups noted that food assistance practitioners sometimes design programs around provider convenience rather than recipient dignity. “There’s a dehumanization of people who ask for help.”	Fund compensated community governance roles

Theme 5: Focus on Local Farmers, Processors, & Distributors

Overall Finding: Farmers are consulted, but they are not consistently centered in policy and planning decisions. Infrastructure gaps—particularly processing and cold storage—limit farm viability.

See also: Section 5 (Farmland & Small Farm Development) and Hindlewood Farm Case Study

Indicator	Score	Summary Assessment	Priority Actions
Farmer voice in planning	3	Input gathered through assessment process; ongoing influence limited. Hindlewood Farm operators had not been invited to participate in food council or planning meetings despite willingness to engage.	Fund advisory stipends and formal roles
Extension & technical assistance	3	Valued but capacity constrained. Cornell Cooperative Extension contact and resources available, but farmers report limited engagement. Grant applications described as challenging: “I was way in over my head.”	Increase staffing and farmer-led TA
Market access for producers	2	Top policy priority (34 survey mentions for “Support for local farms and food businesses”). “Lower prices” cited 24 times as barrier to local purchasing—tension between farm viability and consumer affordability.	Fund farm-to-institution and buyer matchmaking; develop subsidy mechanisms
Processing & distribution infrastructure	2	Identified as a major gap. Cold storage at capacity (household chest freezers). Equipment access limited. No formal livestock trailer or equipment-sharing program.	Capital funding for food hubs and cold storage

Theme 6: Food Sovereignty

Overall Finding: Inequities are clearly named and documented, but corrective actions and co-creation are not yet consistently funded or institutionalized.

See also: Section 2 (Hunger Education) and Section 4 (Public Health & Nutrition)

Indicator	Score	Summary Assessment	Priority Actions
Public acknowledgment of inequities	3	Strong diagnosis across assessment. Racial disparities documented: 41.9% poverty rate for Black/African American residents in Broome County vs. 15.3% for White residents. ALICE framework adopted and communicated.	Tie equity commitments to budgets and metrics
Addressing social determinants of health	2	Action lags behind understanding. Living wage for 1 adult/1 child is \$39.21/hour; minimum wage is \$16.00/hour—a gap of \$23+/hour (\$48,000+ annually). Housing, transportation, and wages identified as root causes but addressed separately from food programming.	Fund housing-food-transport integration
Co-creation with impacted communities	2	Engagement present; compensation inconsistent. Survey and focus group data collected, but ongoing power-sharing mechanisms not institutionalized.	Fund participatory design and resident leadership
Workforce pathways (especially youth)	2	Need identified; pipelines unclear. Focus groups highlighted youth risks related to obesity and poor nutrition. No documented youth food system career pathways.	Invest in paid internships and training

Theme 7: Place-Based Economics

Overall Finding: The region has a strong shared understanding of challenges (this assessment demonstrates diagnostic capacity), but economic value continues to leak out of the local food system.

See also: Section 5 (Farmland & Small Farm Development) and Section 7 (Tioga County)

Indicator	Score	Summary Assessment	Priority Actions
Leadership understanding of food system	4	Diagnosis is strong and aligned. Comprehensive assessment demonstrates deep understanding of interconnected challenges. Community shared vision: “No one goes hungry in Broome/Tioga.”	Shift from assessment to implementation
Data on social determinants of health	3	Data exists through ALICE framework, poverty reports, and this assessment; coordination and shared dashboards limited.	Invest in shared dashboards
Local ownership & value retention	2	Wealth leakage persists. Tioga County food leaves for external markets. IBM departure removed high-income residents and destabilized local economy. Binghamton University students bring temporary spending without permanent roots.	Fund cooperatives, CDFIs, mission-driven finance
Food system job creation	2	Potential high; coordination low. No explicit policy goal to reduce unemployment through food system job matching.	Fund workforce intermediaries and employer partnerships

CARAT Summary Insight

The Broome-Tioga regional foodshed demonstrates strong diagnostic capacity and functional emergency response systems, but long-term resilience will require:

1. **Shifting from crisis response to infrastructure investment:** Cold storage, transportation corridors, and processing facilities are consistently identified gaps
2. **Compensating community leadership:** Lived experience is gathered but not consistently resourced or empowered in decision-making
3. **Strengthening local processing, distribution, and ownership:** Significant “market leakage” undermines regional self-reliance
4. **Aligning food, housing, transportation, and health strategies:** Root causes of food insecurity are economic; siloed programming cannot address systemic issues

Regional Foodshed Approach: This assessment formally recognizes Broome and Tioga Counties as a single, interdependent foodshed. Tioga County’s farmland and Broome County’s population centers are interconnected—food security in one county cannot be addressed in isolation from the other.

Emergency Food Context: The emergency food system—including food recovery organizations (CHOW’s Broome Bounty, Good Neighbors), emergency food distribution sites (pantries, meal programs), and the Food Bank of the Southern Tier—functions effectively but is stretched. FBST distributed over 1.4 million pounds of fresh produce in Broome County and 330,000 pounds in Tioga County in 2024. However, the current system’s reliance on recovered surplus and aging volunteer labor creates sustainability risks that must be addressed.

Core Principle: Emergency food should be for actual emergencies—not as a permanent solution to food insecurity. Addressing root causes (housing costs, transportation barriers, wages) while centering the voices of those with lived experience must guide the transition from emergency response to systemic change.

Cross-Reference to Main Report

CARAT Theme	Main Report Section
Theme 1: Natural Resource Management	Section 5: Farmland & Small Farm Development; Appendix: Hindlewood Farm Case Study
Theme 2: Community Health & Well-Being	Section 4: Public Health & Nutrition
Theme 3: Community Self-Reliance	Section 5: Farmland & Small Farm Development
Theme 4: Distributive & Democratic Leadership	Section 2: Hunger Education; Section 6: Food Access Plan Expansion
Theme 5: Focus on Local Farmers	Section 5: Farmland & Small Farm Development
Theme 6: Food Sovereignty	Section 2: Hunger Education; Section 4: Public Health & Nutrition
Theme 7: Place-Based Economics	Section 5: Farmland & Small Farm Development; Section 7: Tioga County

10. CARAT Case Study: Hindlewood Farm

Introduction

This case study offers a snapshot of one farm operation in Broome County, illustrating how themes from the Community & Agriculture Resilience Audit Tool (CARAT) manifest in a specific local context. Hindlewood Farm’s experience is not representative of all farms or all beginning farmers in the region—rather, it opens up questions for further consideration and highlights themes that emerged across this assessment’s broader research.

The operators’ perspectives, shaped by their particular circumstances, background, and community connections, provide one entry point into understanding the local food system landscape.

Methodology Note

This interview was conducted using a guide informed by the **Community & Agriculture Resilience Audit Tool (CARAT)**, a framework developed by the North American Food Systems Network to assess how communities use local food system assets to achieve resilience. The CARAT framework organizes community resilience around seven themes: Natural Resource Management, Community Health & Well-being, Community Self-Reliance in Food, Distributed & Democratic Leadership, Focus on Local Farmers/Processors/Distributors, Food Sovereignty, and Place-Based Economics.

The interview guide translated CARAT’s policy-focused indicators into farmer-centered questions about lived experience, allowing the assessment team to gather qualitative data that complements broader policy and program analysis. A CARAT Framework Analysis section at the end of this case study maps Hindlewood Farm’s experience back to these seven themes.

Farm Profile



Location	Broome County, NY
Acreage	18 acres
Year Established	2023
Operators	Elias and Eliana, young couple (mid-20s), expecting first child
Primary Products	Pastured broilers, lamb, laying hens Garden vegetables (personal consumption)
Sales Channels	Direct-to-consumer via Instagram, on-farm sales, friends/family network
Market Presence	Connected to Binghamton Farmers Market (operator serves as board president)
Off-Farm Employment	Both operators work off-farm; primary income covers mortgage and taxes

Farm Vision

The operators articulate a three-tiered vision for their farm's future:

- 1. Short-term (3-5 years):** Farm income covers property taxes

2. **Medium-term:** Transform the property into an educational and community space with workshops, school visits, and programming
3. **Long-term:** Transition to full-time farming without reliance on off-farm employment

“My dream is that I can quit my off-farm job and have this provide all the income that I need.”
—Elias, Hindlewood Farm

Focus Area 1: Hunger Education

Consumer Knowledge Gap

Hindlewood Farm operators identify a fundamental disconnect between consumer expectations and the true cost of sustainably-raised food. Despite selling pastured poultry at \$8/pound (or \$7.50 for returning customers), they encounter persistent resistance rooted in comparisons to commodity pricing.

“You’ll go to the supermarket, and you’ll see chicken breast for a buck fifty a pound or two dollars a pound. And it’s almost impossible for those customers who aren’t ecologically minded to understand why this costs so much more.” —Elias, Hindlewood Farm

This knowledge gap extends beyond pricing to encompass understanding of:

- Animal welfare standards in pastured vs. confined operations
- Environmental benefits of rotational grazing
- True cost accounting in food production
- Seasonal availability of pastured products



Questions for Consideration

This farm's experience raises questions worth exploring further:

- How widespread is the consumer knowledge gap about sustainable food pricing?
- What educational infrastructure exists—or could exist—to bridge this gap?

Focus Area 2: Food Waste & Recovery

On-Farm Waste Management

Hindlewood Farm employs integrated waste cycling practices:

- **Food scraps:** Diverted to laying hens rather than landfill
- **Manure management:** Horse and sheep manure collected in windrows, turned annually for composting
- **Garden waste:** Incorporated into low/no-till “lasagna” bed construction using cardboard, wood chips, and compost layers

Food Recovery Context

Eliana was deeply involved in founding Binghamton Food Rescue approximately ten years ago, prior to starting the farm. From that experience, she observes that food recovery efforts in the county would benefit from greater coordination—with organizations specializing in complementary roles rather than duplicating similar work. This perspective aligns with broader community input about the need for collaboration across food system organizations.

Focus Area 3: Public Health & Nutrition

Farmers Market as Health Infrastructure

As board vice president of the Downtown Binghamton Courtyard Market, Eliana provides insight into market-based nutrition access programs:

Market Greens Program

- Funded by local businesses
- Provides two \$10 coupons with no eligibility requirements
- No questions asked; no documentation required
- Addresses gaps in SNAP/WIC coverage

“[Market Greens Program] is free. It’s like supplemental... a lot of people fall through the cracks of SNAP and WIC and any other kinds of programming.” —Eliana, Hindlewood Farm

Market offerings include:

- Meat vendors
- Vegetables
- Flowers
- Prepared foods
- Baked goods
- Honey, maple syrup, coffee
- Hot sauce, mushrooms

Challenges to market sustainability:

- Vendor inconsistency affects customer reliability
- Seasonal operation limits year-round access
- Vendor demographics skew white and young families

Food Access Barriers

The operators identify structural factors limiting healthy food access:

“Downtown Binghamton... that’s a food desert, or food apartheid, whatever term you’d like to use, but there aren’t supermarkets within walking distance for the people that live in Downtown Binghamton. And so, how are they accessing food? They’re not accessing fresh produce.”

—Elias, Hindlewood Farm

Focus Area 4: Farmland & Small Farm Development



Land Access Pathway

Hindlewood Farm represents a successful land access story with replicable elements:

- Two-year property search with clear criteria
- Purchased from estate sale (previous owners deceased, heirs motivated to sell)
- Property included equipment (ATV, tractor)
- Entered farming as a learning process, experimenting with different enterprises to find what works for their context

Conservation & Sustainability Practices

Active Programs:

- Trees for Tributaries (Broome County Soil & Water Conservation District)—riparian buffer installed with volunteer labor
- Right to Farm protection registration
- NRCS prescribed grazing plan application (pending for next year)

On-Farm Practices:

- Rotational grazing with 30-60 day rest periods based on season
- Rain barrel water collection
- No synthetic fertilizers or pesticides
- Low/no-till garden management
- Organic feed for poultry (seeking organic certification)



Barriers to Farm Viability

Barrier	Details
Certification capacity	Regional organic certifier not accepting new animal operations
Tax structure	\$10,000 agricultural income threshold not yet met; missing potential exemptions
Zoning knowledge	Uncertainty about current zoning status; needs assistance with potential rezoning
Processing infrastructure	Dependent on external processors for poultry and lamb
Cold storage	Chest freezers at capacity; would need shared cold storage to scale
Equipment access	Using improvised livestock trailer; would benefit from equipment sharing program
Technical assistance	Limited engagement; mostly self-taught via YouTube and extension resources

Climate Adaptation

Current impacts:

- Drought conditions extending necessary pasture rest periods
- Grazing season shortened due to slower grass regrowth

Adaptation strategies:

- Purchasing excess hay as an “insurance policy”
- Flexible rotation scheduling
- Interest in solar energy, but deterred by what a solar company described as an approximately 25-year payback period and continued grid dependence

Grant-Seeking Experience

Program	Status	Notes
NRCS prescribed grazing	Applied; deferred to next year	Would fund fencing infrastructure
NY Farm Viability Institute Beginning Farmer Grant	Applied; not awarded	“I was way in over my head”—plans to reapply for pastured poultry expansion
Barn renovation funding	Seeking	Unclear pathway for educational infrastructure investment

Focus Area 5: Food Access Plan Expansion

Systems-Level Analysis

The operators offer sophisticated analysis of Broome County’s food insecurity drivers, moving beyond emergency food responses to identify root causes:

Structural factors identified:

1. **Poverty rate:** 18.9% county-wide, rising to 32.9% in the City of Binghamton; child poverty reaches 23.8% county-wide and 41.6% in the city (Greater Opportunities, 2025)
2. **Economic history:** IBM’s departure removed high-income residents and destabilized the local economy
3. **Brain drain:** Binghamton University students bring temporary spending but don’t establish permanent roots
4. **Business orientation:** Commercial establishments cater to the transient student population rather than long-term residents
5. **Benefit thresholds:** Living wage calculations that disqualify families from assistance while remaining inadequate for actual needs—the living wage for one adult with one child is \$39.21/hour, far exceeding the county median income of \$45,753/year

Coordination Deficit

Eliana observes that food assistance programs are sometimes designed around **provider needs** rather than recipient needs and dignity:

“There’s a lot of people that are involved in this food world that don’t have a true understanding of food insecurity, and so are not necessarily addressing issues in the right way... like want people to write their names if they’re getting food assistance, but maybe people don’t want to write their names.” —Eliana, Hindlewood Farm

This suggests that centering the voices and experiences of those facing food insecurity—rather than provider assumptions about their needs—should inform program design.

Local Food System Viability

The operators identify a fundamental tension: local farms cannot achieve financial sustainability without consumers willing to pay true-cost prices, yet economic conditions in the county limit purchasing power.

“If there was more money locally, like if we were in Westchester, I think it would just be a little bit different. But it’s harder for people to support small farms.” —Eliana, Hindlewood Farm

This suggests food access planning must address both supply-side farm viability and demand-side economic conditions simultaneously.

CARAT Framework Analysis

The following analysis maps Hindlewood Farm’s experience to the seven themes of the Community & Agriculture Resilience Audit Tool. This demonstrates how a single farm operation intersects with broader community resilience factors—and where gaps or opportunities may exist.

Theme 1: Natural Resource Management

CARAT’s first theme examines how communities protect farmland, promote soil health, preserve natural resources, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions in food production.

Hindlewood Farm demonstrates several resilience-supporting practices: rotational grazing with 30-60 day rest periods to maintain pasture health, participation in the Trees for Tributaries riparian buffer program, composting of animal manure, and avoidance of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. The operators have applied for an NRCS-prescribed grazing plan that would further formalize their conservation approach.

However, climate adaptation remains a challenge. Drought conditions in 2025 extended necessary rest periods and shortened the grazing season—a pressure likely to intensify. The operators expressed interest in solar energy but found the 25-year payback period and continued reliance on the grid discouraging. This suggests potential gaps in accessible climate adaptation support for small operations.

Theme 2: Community Health & Well-being

This theme focuses on improving access to nutritious, affordable, and culturally appropriate foods, particularly for food-insecure populations, and integrating food considerations into emergency planning.

Eliana’s role as board vice president of the Downtown Binghamton Courtyard Market provides direct insight here. The Market Greens program—privately funded, no-questions-asked \$10 coupons—represents an innovative approach to filling gaps in federal nutrition assistance. The market also accepts SNAP and EBT. These market-based interventions expand access to fresh food beyond what government programs alone provide.

At the same time, Elias identifies downtown Binghamton as a food desert where residents lack walkable access to fresh produce. The farm's direct-to-consumer model via Instagram reaches motivated buyers but does not address geographic access barriers for residents without transportation or internet access.

Theme 3: Community Self-Reliance in Food

CARAT's third theme examines the community's ability to meet its own food needs and reduce dependence on external supply chains.

Hindlewood Farm contributes to local self-reliance by selling pastured poultry and lamb directly to Broome County residents. The operators estimate most local sales stay within the county, with some products going to friends and family downstate. Their 5,000-square-foot garden provides food for household consumption, modeling small-scale self-sufficiency.

Yet barriers to scaling remain significant. The farm has not yet reached the \$10,000 agricultural income threshold for tax exemptions. Processing depends entirely on external facilities. Cold storage is at capacity with household chest freezers. Without infrastructure investment, the farm's contribution to the local food supply will remain modest.

Theme 4: Distributed & Democratic Leadership

This theme addresses whether leadership and decision-making in the food system include diverse voices, particularly those historically marginalized.

Elias and Eliana are not currently engaged in formal food system planning processes. When asked whether farmers' voices are heard in local planning and policy, Elias responded: *"I don't think I have my finger on the pulse enough to know."* He had not been invited to participate in food council, agricultural board, or planning meetings—though he expressed willingness to engage if the time commitment were manageable.

This suggests a potential gap: willing farmers who are not being actively recruited into planning conversations. Eliana's leadership on the Downtown Binghamton Courtyard Market board demonstrates capacity for engagement when pathways exist.

Theme 5: Focus on Local Farmers, Food Processors, and Distributors

CARAT's fifth theme examines whether the food system actively supports local producers through infrastructure, technical assistance, financial resources, and attention to their concerns.

Hindlewood Farm's experience is mixed. The operators have accessed support through Cornell Cooperative Extension contact, the Cornell Sheep and Goat Symposium, Right to Farm registration, and conservation program participation. They applied for NRCS funding (deferred) and a NY Farm Viability Institute beginning farmer grant (not awarded, with plans to reapply).

However, gaps are evident. The regional organic certifier is not accepting new animal operations, blocking a desired certification pathway. The operators are uncertain about zoning status and potential tax exemptions. Grant applications proved challenging without support: *"I was way in over my head."* Technical assistance has been limited; Elias describes being mostly self-taught

through YouTube and extension resources. Infrastructure needs—cold storage, equipment sharing, livestock trailer access—remain unmet.

Theme 6: Food Sovereignty

Food sovereignty, as defined in the Declaration of Nyéléni, is “the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems.”

Eliana observes that some food assistance practitioners design programs around provider convenience rather than recipient dignity—such as requiring recipients to provide names when they may prefer anonymity. This reflects a broader pattern where those experiencing food insecurity are not centered in program design.

The operators also identify a consumer knowledge gap that limits community self-determination. When residents don’t understand why pastured poultry costs more than commodity chicken, they cannot make informed choices about their food system. Education—for providers and consumers alike—emerges as foundational to food sovereignty.

Theme 7: Place-Based Economics

The final CARAT theme examines whether policies, programs, and investments enhance local ownership, build workforce capacity, and develop infrastructure that supports local food production and distribution.

Hindlewood Farm’s infrastructure needs highlight gaps in place-based economic development: cold storage facilities, equipment-sharing programs, and processing capacity. Without these investments, small farms face significant barriers to scaling their contributions to the local food supply.

Elias and Eliana’s analysis of Broome County’s economic context is sobering. They point to the IBM departure, brain drain from Binghamton University, and benefit thresholds that disqualify families from assistance while leaving them unable to afford food. [Verified data confirms these concerns](#): the poverty rate is 18.9% county-wide but 32.9% in the City of Binghamton, with an additional 25% of households classified as ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed)—working but still struggling. These structural economic conditions constrain both farm viability (limited local purchasing power) and food access (limited household resources). Place-based economic development that addresses wages, employment, and wealth-building may be a prerequisite to a thriving local food system.

CARAT Theme Summary Table

CARAT Theme	Hindlewood Farm Connection	Questions Raised
Natural Resource Management	Rotational grazing, riparian buffers, composting, no synthetic inputs, NRCS application pending	How accessible is climate adaptation support for small operations?

Community Health & Well-being	Market Greens program, SNAP/EBT at market, food desert identification	Can market-based interventions scale to address geographic access gaps?
Community Self-Reliance	Direct local sales, household garden, diversified livestock	What infrastructure would enable small farms to scale local contributions?
Distributed Leadership	Farmers market board role, openness to food council engagement, not currently invited to planning	How are farmers being recruited into formal planning processes?
Farmer Support	Mixed access to programs; certification, technical assistance, and grant barriers	What support would help beginning farmers navigate available resources?
Food Sovereignty	Critique of provider-centered program design, consumer education gaps	How can food assistance be redesigned around recipient dignity and choice?
Place-Based Economics	Infrastructure needs (cold storage, equipment, processing), economic context analysis	What upstream economic interventions would enable the viability of local food systems?

Questions for Future Consideration

This case study illustrates how broader assessment themes manifest in a specific local context. It also surfaces questions that may warrant further exploration—either in future assessment work or as the Food Council implements the Action Plan.

Hunger Education

Elias identifies a consumer knowledge gap as a barrier to farm viability—customers compare pastured poultry to commodity prices without understanding production differences.

Questions raised:

- How widespread is this consumer knowledge gap beyond this single operation?
- Does the Food Council’s hunger education work have a role in broader consumer education about local food systems, or is that outside its scope?
- What is the relationship between consumer purchasing decisions and local farm viability at a systems level?

Food Waste & Recovery

Hindlewood Farm employs integrated on-farm waste cycling, and Eliana's prior food recovery experience informs her observation that sector coordination could improve impact.

Questions raised:

- To what extent do other farms in the region practice on-farm waste diversion?
- How might on-farm practices connect to the broader food waste reduction strategy outlined in the Action Plan?

Public Health & Nutrition

The Market Greens program at the Downtown Binghamton Courtyard Market demonstrates a low-barrier approach to nutrition access—privately funded, with no eligibility requirements.

Questions raised:

- Are similar programs operating elsewhere in the region?
- What is the reach and impact of market-based nutrition interventions compared to other approaches?
- How do these programs interact with federal nutrition assistance (complementary, duplicative, filling gaps)?

Farmland & Small Farm Development

Hindlewood Farm faces compounding barriers: organic certifier capacity, tax thresholds, zoning uncertainty, challenging grant applications, and unmet infrastructure needs.

Questions raised:

- How common are these specific barriers across other beginning and small-scale farm operations?
- What technical assistance resources currently exist, and are farmers aware of and accessing them?
- The Action Plan addresses farm policy at the advocacy level—is there an implementation gap in direct farmer support?

Food Access Plan Expansion

The operators identify root causes of food insecurity that align with broader assessment findings: poverty, benefit cliff effects, and economic conditions constraining both farm viability and household purchasing power.

Questions raised:

- How do farmers' perspectives on food insecurity drivers compare to those of service providers and residents with lived experience?
- What role, if any, should agricultural producers play in Food Council governance and planning?

Cross-Cutting Observation

This interview illustrates how challenges across focus areas interconnect in practice—consumer education gaps affect farm income, which in turn constrains the local food supply, while economic conditions suppress demand and undermine viability simultaneously. The Action Plan's systems approach reflects this interdependence, though implementation will reveal whether work group structures adequately address cross-cutting dynamics.

Interview conducted October 30, 2025, at Hindlewood Farm, Broome County, NY, by Seeds of Change Consulting for the Broome County Food Council

Appendix A: Stakeholder Engagement Summary

This assessment used a mixed-methods approach to gather comprehensive insights into the food systems of Broome and Tioga Counties, integrating quantitative data from a community survey with extensive qualitative input from diverse stakeholders.

Engagement Methods and Participants

The assessment was designed and conducted by **Seeds of Change Consulting**, with a rigorous review and revision process by the **Broome County Food Council Steering Committee** to ensure local relevance.

- **Online Community & Stakeholder Survey (Quantitative):**
 - **51** unique individual responses were collected, with respondents able to select either Broome (30 responses) and/or Tioga (26 responses) Counties. There were 30 respondents in total who stated being engaged with the Broome County Food Council. Of those 30 responses, 26 reflected individuals that lived/worked in Broome county and 8 reflected individuals that lived/worked in Tioga county. (Some respondents may be counted in both counties if they live or work in both.)
- **Focus Group Discussions (Qualitative):**
 - **Thematic Areas:** Public Health & Nutrition (2 groups), Food Waste & Recovery (3 groups), Hunger Education, Small Farms & Farmland Development (separate groups for Broome and Tioga).
 - **Participants:** Included Broome Food Council members, health department staff, community-based organization staff, university faculty, county agency staff, small and large-scale farmers, food pantry/food bank staff, and Cooperative Extension staff. Across all the focus groups, there were 39 individuals who participated.
- **Key Informant Interviews (Qualitative):**
 - Targeted one-on-one discussions were conducted with specific high-level groups: **Policy & Agriculture-Support Stakeholders (4)** and broader **General Stakeholders (11)**.

Key Themes, Quotes, and Metrics

Theme	Summary of Findings	Key Stakeholder Quotes & Metrics
Systemic Barriers & Root Causes	The environment is a “ food swamp ” driven by structural barriers like transportation, housing instability, and the cost of healthy food, rather than a simple lack of food supply.	Metric: Transportation or distance to stores was the single most-reported challenge to food access (37 mentions), surpassing the cost of food (34 mentions) . Quote: <i>“This is band-aid work. We’re not ending poverty... SNAP is a band-aid, not a solution.”</i> - Food Waste & Recovery focus group note on Systemic Change
Food Recovery as a Fragile Lifeline	Frontline organizations are heavily reliant on food recovery—sourcing meat and produce—to meet demand, but this essential system is described as “fragile.” Infrastructure gaps, particularly cold storage and an aging volunteer workforce , are key barriers.	Metric: The community cited Restaurants (41 mentions) and Grocery Stores (37 mentions) as the primary sources of waste, aligning with a demand for systemic solutions. Quote: <i>“About 80% of the food we distribute is from recovery—retail, grocery, and even farm partners.”</i> -Food Waste & Recovery focus group on Reliance <i>“Our warehouse is relatively small... sometimes we can’t get as much food as we want because of space.”</i> -Food Waste & Recovery focus group on Cold Storage Limitations

Regional Foodshed & Supply Chain	The assessment confirmed a structural reliance, where Tioga County serves as the agricultural production base but lacks the commercial processing and distribution infrastructure found in Broome. Logistical gaps are currently being filled with ad hoc solutions such as “volunteer drivers” and “farm partners.”	Metric: The community’s highest policy priority was Support for local farms and food businesses (34 mentions), with the most popular solution for access being the creation of More farm stands or markets (28 mentions). Quote: Successful interventions require frameworks like the “<i>Broome-Tioga Mobility Management Project</i>” to bridge the gap and treat the two counties as a single foodshed rather than separate jurisdictions. -Farmland & Small Farm Development focus group
Economic Strain and Vulnerability	Financial pressure is a core challenge for both households and local organizations. This is exacerbated by high property taxes for farmers and policy shifts like SNAP/benefit cuts or delays. The “Cost of food” is a primary challenge across the board.	Metric: Cost of food was the primary challenge for both households and organizations in Tioga County. SNAP/benefit cuts or delays were cited by 22 respondents as a major challenge to food access. Quote: “<i>Most of the people producing food here find the majority of their sales are actually outside of the county.</i>” -Tioga County Focus Group on Market Leakage “<i>Farmers face significant headwinds, including ‘massive taxes, especially property tax’...</i>” -Tioga County Focus Group on Economic Viability
Vulnerability and Service Integration	There is a crucial “gap” population—the “working poor”—who earn too much for benefits but still rely on emergency food. Moreover, the current system is hindered by bureaucratic silos, where “resource overload” makes it difficult for families in crisis to navigate uncoordinated services.	Metric: When asked about policy priorities, more affordable housing was highly ranked (28 mentions), highlighting the community’s view of housing as inseparable from food security. Stakeholders envisioned integrated solutions, such as “hub” models that co-locate food, healthcare, and childcare services to reduce barriers

		and combat “resource overload.”
Public Awareness, Stigma, and Education	One focus group highlighted significant challenges in public understanding and awareness of food insecurity, driven by persistent stigma against benefit recipients (e.g., SNAP) and by the general public’s underestimation of the issue’s complexity. Education initiatives and simulations are valuable for fostering empathy, but often reach only those already engaged, making it difficult to turn awareness into sustained advocacy and action. The group also discussed the complexity of systemic barriers (e.g., transportation issues, policy disconnects) that impede progress.	Quote (Stigma): <i>“The dominant narrative ... is that folks on SNAP don’t want to work or are lazy—this is mostly incorrect.”</i> -Hunger Education focus group Quote (Systemic Disconnect): <i>“Government is ... completely out of touch to think that putting low-income housing in the middle of a food desert is a good idea.”</i> -Public Health & Nutrition focus group Quote (Action Gap): <i>“Workshops often evoke strong emotional reactions but actions afterward are passive or short-lived.”</i> -Hunger Education focus group Quote (Innovative Idea): <i>“In a dream world, every decision-maker would have to shadow someone with lived experience for a day.”</i> -Hunger Education focus group

Appendix B: Community Survey Responses (Disaggregated)

Question number	Answer choice	Broome county responses	Tioga county responses	No county identified responses
1. Which of the following best describes you? (Select all that apply)	Community member	16	4	4
1. Which of the following best describes you? (Select all that apply)	Community or nonprofit organization	16	8	2
1. Which of the following best describes you? (Select all that apply)	Emergency food provider (pantry, meal site, etc.)	13	3	0
1. Which of the following best describes you? (Select all that apply)	Farmer	1	2	0
1. Which of the following best describes you? (Select all that apply)	Food recovery / food distribution organization	5	1	0
1. Which of the following best describes you? (Select all that apply)	Government or policy professional	2	1	2

1. Which of the following best describes you? (Select all that apply)	Hunger education or nutrition educator	4	0	0
1. Which of the following best describes you? (Select all that apply)	Other	3	1	2
1. Which of the following best describes you? (Select all that apply)	Public health professional	3	1	1
Question number	Answer choice	Broome county responses	Tioga county responses	No county identified responses
2. Which county do you live and/or work in?	Broome County	30	5	0
2. Which county do you live and/or work in?	Other	2	0	0
2. Which county do you live and/or work in?	Tioga County	5	26	0
4. Are you engaged with the Broome County Food Council?	I'm not familiar with the Broome County Food Council	2	0	0

4. Are you engaged with the Broome County Food Council?	No	2	8	6
4. Are you engaged with the Broome County Food Council?	Not involved but interested	1	1	0
4. Are you engaged with the Broome County Food Council?	Not involved intentionally	1	2	0
4. Are you engaged with the Broome County Food Council?	Yes	26	3	1
Question number	Answer choice	Broome county responses	Tioga county responses	No county identified responses
6. What are the biggest food access challenges you see in your community? (Select up to 3)	Cost of food	25	9	0
6. What are the biggest food access challenges you see in your community? (Select up to 3)	Lack of information about food resources	3	4	0

6. What are the biggest food access challenges you see in your community? (Select up to 3)	Limited culturally preferred foods	7	1	0
6. What are the biggest food access challenges you see in your community? (Select up to 3)	Limited fresh or healthy food	12	6	4
6. What are the biggest food access challenges you see in your community? (Select up to 3)	Limited hours or availability of food pantries	4	5	0
6. What are the biggest food access challenges you see in your community? (Select up to 3)	Other	3	1	0
6. What are the biggest food access challenges you see in your community? (Select up to 3)	SNAP/benefit cuts or delays	16	6	0
6. What are the biggest food access challenges you see in your community? (Select up to 3)	Stigma or difficulty asking for help	9	7	0

6. What are the biggest food access challenges you see in your community? (Select up to 3)	Transportation or distance to stores	25	12	0
Question number	Answer choice	Broome county responses	Tioga county responses	No county identified responses
7. How well do you think the public understands hunger and food insecurity in your community?	A little	13	6	0
7. How well do you think the public understands hunger and food insecurity in your community?	Not at all	0	1	0
7. How well do you think the public understands hunger and food insecurity in your community?	Somewhat	14	6	0
7. How well do you think the public understands hunger and food insecurity in your community?	Very well	3	1	0

Question number	Answer choice	Broome county responses	Tioga county responses	No county identified responses
8. Have you seen food waste as an issue where you live or work?	No	7	3	2
8. Have you seen food waste as an issue where you live or work?	Not sure	10	4	0
8. Have you seen food waste as an issue where you live or work?	Yes	13	7	3
9. Where do you think the most food is wasted locally? (Select up to 3)	Farms	2	0	0
9. Where do you think the most food is wasted locally? (Select up to 3)	Grocery stores	22	11	4
9. Where do you think the most food is wasted locally? (Select up to 3)	Households	17	4	3
9. Where do you think the most food is wasted locally? (Select up to 3)	Other	3	0	0

9. Where do you think the most food is wasted locally? (Select up to 3)	Restaurants	26	12	3
9. Where do you think the most food is wasted locally? (Select up to 3)	Schools	8	5	4
Question number	Answer choice	Broome county responses	Tioga county responses	No county identified responses
10. What would help reduce food waste in your community? (Select all that apply)	Apps or technology to connect extra food with people who need it	16	6	2
10. What would help reduce food waste in your community? (Select all that apply)	Better storage or refrigeration	6	3	2
10. What would help reduce food waste in your community? (Select all that apply)	Better transportation or delivery options	11	5	3
10. What would help reduce food waste in your community? (Select all that apply)	More food recovery programs	12	12	4

10. What would help reduce food waste in your community? (Select all that apply)	More information about food expiration/safety	11	5	4
10. What would help reduce food waste in your community? (Select all that apply)	Other	5	1	0
10. What would help reduce food waste in your community? (Select all that apply)	Policies that support donating food	20	11	4
Question number	Answer choice	Broome county responses	Tioga county responses	No county identified responses
11. Do you buy from local farmers?	Never	7	1	0
11. Do you buy from local farmers?	Rarely	4	2	1
11. Do you buy from local farmers?	Sometimes	9	8	3
11. Do you buy from local farmers?	Yes, regularly	10	3	1

12. What would make it easier for you (or others) to buy locally grown food? (Select all that apply)	Accepting SNAP/WIC	6	4	0
12. What would make it easier for you (or others) to buy locally grown food? (Select all that apply)	Better advertising or information	11	6	4
12. What would make it easier for you (or others) to buy locally grown food? (Select all that apply)	Delivery options	7	5	0
Question number	Answer choice	Broome county responses	Tioga county responses	No county identified responses
12. What would make it easier for you (or others) to buy locally grown food? (Select all that apply)	Lower prices	17	5	2
12. What would make it easier for you (or others) to buy locally grown food? (Select all that apply)	More culturally preferred foods	5	2	0

12. What would make it easier for you (or others) to buy locally grown food? (Select all that apply)	More farm stands or markets	15	9	4
12. What would make it easier for you (or others) to buy locally grown food? (Select all that apply)	More locations in my neighborhood	11	6	0
12. What would make it easier for you (or others) to buy locally grown food? (Select all that apply)	Other	4	3	0
17. Which types of policy changes would most improve the food system? (Select all that apply)	Better transportation options	16	11	2
Question number	Answer choice	Broome county responses	Tioga county responses	No county identified responses
17. Which types of policy changes would most improve the food system? (Select all that apply)	Incentives for donating food	15	10	3
17. Which types of policy changes would most	Increasing SNAP or	17	10	2

improve the food system? (Select all that apply)	other food benefits			
17. Which types of policy changes would most improve the food system? (Select all that apply)	More affordable housing	22	4	2
17. Which types of policy changes would most improve the food system? (Select all that apply)	Other	6	2	0
17. Which types of policy changes would most improve the food system? (Select all that apply)	Reducing barriers for starting food-related businesses	11	7	1
17. Which types of policy changes would most improve the food system? (Select all that apply)	Support for local farms and food businesses	21	10	3

Appendix C: Data Collection Tools

Community Survey

This survey is being conducted by the Seeds of Change consulting team in partnership with the Broome County Food Council. We are developing a county-wide Food Action Plan to strengthen food access, reduce food waste, support public health, and promote local agriculture.

Your input will help ensure the plan reflects the experiences and needs of community members, organizations, farmers, and stakeholders across Broome and Tioga counties.

The survey is open to all residents of Broome County and Tioga County. It takes about 5–7 minutes to complete. All responses are anonymous unless you choose to share your name or organization.

1. About You

Which of the following best describes you? *(Select all that apply)*

- ☐ Community member
- ☐ Farmer
- ☐ Emergency food provider (pantry, meal site, etc.)
- ☐ Food recovery / food distribution organization
- ☐ Hunger education or nutrition educator
- ☐ Public health professional
- ☐ Local business (restaurant, grocery, food retailer)
- ☐ Community or nonprofit organization
- ☐ Government or policy professional
- ☐ Other (please describe): _____

If you represent an organization, what is its name?
(If not applicable, write “N/A.”)

Which county do you live and/or work in?

- ☐ Broome County
- ☐ Tioga County
- ☐ Other (please describe): _____

Are you engaged with the Broome County Food Council?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not involved but interested
- ☐ Not involved intentionally
- ☐ I’m not familiar with the Broome County Food Council

2. Food Access & Hunger

How would you rate food access in your community (ability to get healthy, affordable, culturally preferred food)?

1 = Very poor; 5 = Excellent

1 2 3 4 5

What are the biggest food access challenges you see in your community? *(Select up to 3)*

- ☐ Cost of food
- ☐ Transportation or distance to stores
- ☐ Limited fresh or healthy food
- ☐ Limited culturally preferred foods
- ☐ SNAP/benefit cuts or delays
- ☐ Lack of information about food resources
- ☐ Limited hours or availability of food pantries
- ☐ Stigma or difficulty asking for help
- ☐ Other: _____

How well do you think the public understands hunger and food insecurity in your community?

- ☐ Not at all
 - ☐ A little
 - ☐ Somewhat
 - ☐ Very well
-

3. Food Waste & Food Recovery

Have you seen food waste as an issue where you live or work?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

Where do you think the most food is wasted locally? *(Select up to 3)*

- ☐ Grocery stores
- ☐ Farms
- ☐ Restaurants
- ☐ Households
- ☐ Schools
- ☐ Food pantries
- ☐ Other: _____

What would help reduce food waste in your community? *(Select all that apply)*

- ☐ Better storage or refrigeration
 - ☐ More food recovery programs
 - ☐ Better transportation or delivery options
 - ☐ More information about food expiration/safety
 - ☐ Policies that support donating food
 - ☐ Apps or technology to connect extra food with people who need it
 - ☐ Other: _____
-

4. Farming & Local Food

Do you buy from local farmers?

- ☐ Yes, regularly
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never
- ☐ Not sure

What would make it easier for you (or others) to buy locally grown food?

- ☐ More farm stands or markets
 - ☐ Lower prices
 - ☐ Accepting SNAP/WIC
 - ☐ More locations in my neighborhood
 - ☐ More culturally preferred foods
 - ☐ Better advertising or information
 - ☐ Delivery options
 - ☐ Other: _____
-

5. Organizational & Community Insights

(Skip if you are not part of an organization.)

What are the biggest challenges your organization is seeing in the food system?
(Short answer) _____

What internal challenges is your organization facing?
(Short answer) _____

What successes or positive changes have you seen in the food system this year?
(Short answer) _____

How have changes such as SNAP cuts affected your work?
(Short answer) _____

6. Policy, Systems & Future Needs

Which types of policy changes would most improve the food system? *(Select all that apply)*

- ☐ Increasing SNAP or other food benefits
- ☐ Incentives for donating food
- ☐ Support for local farms and food businesses
- ☐ Better transportation options
- ☐ More affordable housing
- ☐ Reducing barriers for starting food-related businesses
- ☐ Other: _____

What makes your work, or accessing food more difficult right now?
(Short answer) _____

How prepared do you think the community is to respond to another major food emergency (such as SNAP cuts or a supply shortage)?

1 = Not at all ready; 10 = Completely ready

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

7. Final Thoughts

What is one change that would most improve the local food system?
(Short answer) _____

Anything else you'd like us to know?
(Short answer) _____

Interview Guide: Policy/Ag Support

(Target Audience: Organizational stakeholders, advocates, and policy makers)

Interview Guide: Agriculture & Community Resilience (13 Questions)

Introduction & Background (2-3 minutes)

- Hello, my name is [Your Name], and I'm with the Seeds of Change consulting team.
- Thank you for making time to speak with me.
- We're working with the Broome County Food Council to better understand the successes and challenges within the current food system and those that experience it.
- Your perspective is incredibly valuable for this work.
- This conversation should take about 45-60 minutes. Is it alright if I record this conversation for transcription and analysis?
- Just to confirm, everything we discuss is for our understanding and will be kept confidential.

I. Current Landscape

- Could you tell me about your organization and your role, and your perspective on the current state of agriculture in Broome County?
- What are the most significant system-level challenges facing farmers today?
 - a. (Probes: competition with the global food system, land use pressure, access to fair markets, climate change).
- How does the well-being of farmers and farmworkers—their income, housing, and access to services—impact the resilience of the entire local food system?

II. Opportunities & A Systems-Level Approach

- What are the biggest market opportunities for local farmers that also build a stronger, more connected local food economy?
- What policies—at the local or state level—would create a more supportive environment for small and mid-sized farms to succeed? (Probes: tax policies, zoning laws, farmland protection).
- How does a strong local farm economy contribute to the overall public health and economic well-being of the entire county?

III. Future Vision & The Broome County Food Council

- What is your vision for a vibrant and resilient agricultural system in Broome County 15 years from now?
- What systemic supports or structural changes are needed to ensure the success and viability of the “next generation” of farming in the county?
- Do you feel the Broome County Food Council effectively represents agriculture as a cornerstone of our community’s health and economy?
- Does the county’s Food Action Plan connect farming to broader community issues like economic development and public health?
- How could the Food Council be a more effective advocate for the systemic needs of the farming community?

IV. Wrap-Up

- Is there anything else that is crucial to understand about how farming is connected to the well-being of Broome County as a whole?
- Could you recommend any other organizational leaders, policy makers, or advocates I should connect with?

Virtual Interview Guide: Food Systems Stakeholder

(Target Audience: Policy Makers, Health, Hunger Relief, Waste Recovery in Broome or Tioga County)

Format: Zoom or Phone

Duration: 30–45 Minutes

1. Introduction & Tech Check (2-3 Minutes)

Establish connection, set context, and gain consent.

- “Hi, this is **[Your Name]** with the **Seeds of Change** consulting team. Can you hear me clearly?”
- “Thank you for hopping on this call. We are working with the **Broome County Food Council** to develop a comprehensive **Food Systems Plan** for the region.”
- “Our goal is to identify the best ways to support food access, reduce waste, and strengthen local agriculture in **your county**.”
- “I know everyone is busy, so I’ll keep this to about **30 to 45 minutes**.”
- “Is it alright if I record this conversation for our notes? Everything we discuss will remain confidential.”

2. Current Landscape & Resilience (10-12 Minutes)

Goal: Understand their specific role and the systemic pressures in their specific county.

- **1. Role & Context:** “To start, could you briefly describe your role and how your work (or daily life) connects to the food system in **your county**?”
- **2. Biggest Challenges:** “From your vantage point, what are the biggest challenges facing the food system in **your county** right now? Why do you think these problems persist?”
- **3. Root Causes:** “Looking beyond logistics, what are the **community conditions**—like housing, transportation, labor, or income—that make these challenges harder to solve in **your county**?”
- **4. Emergency Preparedness (Quick Scale):** “Thinking about the community’s ability to bounce back from shocks: **On a scale of 1 to 10** (1 being ‘Not at all ready’ and 10 being ‘Completely ready’), how prepared is **your county** to respond to another major food emergency, such as SNAP cuts or supply shortages?”
 - *Follow up:* “What makes you choose that number?”

3. Opportunities & Policy (10-12 Minutes)

Goal: Identify high-impact changes and cross-sector connections.

- **5. The ‘Magic Wand’:** “If you could change **one policy or aspect of the local economy** to make a long-term difference for food security or agriculture in **your county**, what would it be?”
- **6. Cross-Sector Connections:** “How could the food system work better with other sectors—like healthcare, local government, or economic development—to address the root causes we discussed?”
- **7. Market & Waste Opportunities:** “Where do you see the biggest opportunities to reduce waste or build a stronger local market for farmers in **your county**?”

4. Future Vision & Next Steps (8-10 Minutes)

Goal: Define the long-term goal and the Council’s role.

- **8. The 10-Year Vision:** “Looking forward 10 years, what is your hope for a food-secure and resilient community? What does life look like for residents in **your county** in that best-case scenario?”
- **9. The Next Generation:** “What support is needed right now to ensure the success of the ‘**next generation**’ of food system leaders in this region?”
- **10. Council Support:** “How can the **Food Council** better support your work or advocate for the needs of **your county**?”

5. Wrap-Up (2 Minutes)

Goal: Respect time and close the loop.

- “Is there anything else critical about the connection between food and community well-being in **your county** that I should know?”
- “Thank you again for your time and insight. Have a great rest of your day.”

Virtual Interview Guide: Farmer & Producer

(Target Audience: All Farmers in Broome or Tioga Counties)

Format: Phone or Zoom

Duration: 30–45 Minutes

1. Introduction & Permission (2-3 Minutes)

Establish trust, especially important for traditional communities.

- “Hello, my name is **[Your Name]**, and I’m with the **Seeds of Change** consulting team. Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today.”
- “We are working with the **Broome County Food Council** to listen to farmers like you. Our goal is to build a plan that supports local agriculture and helps farmers succeed. Additionally, we are working to develop a comprehensive **Food Systems Plan** for the region”
- “This call should take about **30 to 45 minutes**. Is now still a good time?”
- “I’ll be taking notes to make sure I capture your thoughts accurately, but everything we discuss is confidential.”

2. The Farm & Resilience (10-12 Minutes)

Goal: Understand what they produce and how the environment is affecting them.

- **1. Farm Profile:** “To start, could you tell me a little bit about your farm? How long have you been farming, and what are the main things you grow or raise?”
 - *Probe:* “What do you enjoy most about this work?”
- **2. Environmental Changes:** “Have you had to change the way you farm recently due to weather patterns, soil health, or pests? How are you handling those changes?”
- **3. Emergency Preparedness (Scale):** “Thinking about your farm’s ability to bounce back from hard times: **On a scale of 1 to 10** (where 1 is ‘Not at all ready’ and 10 is ‘Completely ready’), how prepared is your farm and community to respond to a major emergency, like a supply shortage or extreme weather event?”
 - *Follow up:* “What makes you choose that number?”

3. Markets, Logistics & “The Middle” (10-12 Minutes)

Goal: Understand how food moves (or fails to move) from the farm gate to the customer.

- **4. Sales Channels:** “Thinking about all the food you produce, how do you sell it? Do you sell directly to neighbors and markets, or do you work with wholesalers and stores?”
 - *Probe (for tech-users):* “Do you use any online platforms or apps for sales?”

- *Probe (for traditional)*: “Do you mostly sell here in **your county**, or do you send products across county lines?”
- **5. Logistics & Transport**: “How do you get your products from the farm to the buyer? Is transportation or delivery ever a challenge for you?”
 - *Probe*: “Have you faced any hurdles with **processing, storing, or packaging** your products locally?”

4. Challenges & Opportunities (10-12 Minutes)

Goal: Identify the “pain points” and the “magic wand” solutions.

- **6. Primary Challenges**: “What are the biggest day-to-day challenges for your farm right now? This could be anything from labor costs and regulations to getting a fair price.”
 - *Probe (Labor)*: “Is finding help or labor a struggle right now?”
 - *Probe (Capital)*: “Is accessing money for equipment or expansion a challenge?”
- **7. The ‘Magic Wand’**: “If you had a magic wand and could change **one thing** to make farming in this region better or easier, what would it be?”
- **8. Support Needed**: “What kind of specific support—like training, grants, or better roads/infrastructure—would be most helpful for your farm?”

5. Wrap-Up (2-3 Minutes)

Goal: Respect time and close the loop.

- **9. Future Outlook**: “What are your hopes for your farm in the next few years?”
- **10. Closing**: “Those are all the questions I have. Is there anything else you think the Food Council needs to know about the reality of farming here?”
- “Thank you again for your time. This insight is exactly what we need.”

Focus Group Guide: Hunger Education

Objective: To evaluate the effectiveness of current hunger education initiatives and identify opportunities to enhance public awareness and understanding of food insecurity in Broome County, integrating data collection for the Community & Agriculture Resilience Audit Tool (CARAT).

Target Audience: Educators, community leaders, community members, and staff from non-profit organizations involved in food security work.

I. Introduction (5 minutes)

- Welcome. We are partnering with the Broome County Food Council to develop a county-wide Food Systems Plan. The broad goal of this plan is to find the best ways to support food access, reduce food waste, strengthen public health, and promote local agriculture.
- This discussion will last about 90 minutes. Your feedback is confidential, and we only ask that you listen openly and allow one person to speak at a time. There are no right or wrong answers.
- Do you have any questions before we begin?

II. Professional Perceptions of Hunger in Broome County (15 minutes)

- From your professional standpoint, what are the key issues that come to mind when you consider “hunger” or “food insecurity” in Broome County?
- In your view, how aware is the general public about the scale and complexity of hunger in the community?
- What common public misconceptions have you encountered regarding food insecurity and the factors that contribute to it?
- How do current hunger education efforts address the social determinants of health and overall community well-being?
- To what extent do these initiatives aim to increase the community’s ability to meet its food needs and reduce dependence on external supply chains?

III. Evaluating Current Educational Efforts (20 minutes)

- Which local programs or campaigns aimed at educating the public about hunger are you aware of?
- How effective do you believe these efforts have been in raising awareness and promoting understanding among the general population?
- What do you see as the primary strengths and weaknesses of the current approaches to hunger education?

- How do these educational efforts contribute to improving citizen well-being through better access to nutritious, affordable, and culturally appropriate foods?

IV. Identifying Gaps and Opportunities (15 minutes)

- From an organizational perspective, who are the key audiences that are not being reached by current hunger education efforts?
- What specific topics related to food insecurity are least understood by the public, such as the link between hunger and health or the challenges for working families?
- What are the biggest barriers to effectively educating the community about hunger?
- What opportunities exist to enhance local influence and control in the community's food system through education?

V. Brainstorming Future Strategies (20 minutes)

- What are some innovative ways we could educate people in Broome County about food insecurity?
- What types of messages do you think would be most impactful and resonate with the public?
- What role can schools, local media, and community organizations play in executing these educational efforts?
- If you had the resources, what is one new educational program or initiative you would launch to enhance community resilience through food?

VI. Conclusion (5 minutes)

- Summary of key takeaways.
- Opportunity for any final thoughts.
- Thank you and information on next steps.

Focus Group Guide: Food Waste and Recovery

Objective: To map the local food supply chain, identify key points of food waste, and explore viable strategies for food recovery and redistribution, with a focus on contributing to community and agriculture resilience.

Target Audience: Representatives from food banks, grocery stores, food distributors, and food recovery organizations.

I. Introduction (5 minutes)

- Welcome. We are partnering with the Broome County Food Council to develop a county-wide Food Systems Plan. The broad goal of this plan is to find the best ways to support food access, reduce food waste, strengthen public health, and promote local agriculture.
- This discussion will last about 90 minutes. Your feedback is confidential, and we only ask that you listen openly and allow one person to speak at a time. There are no right or wrong answers. Feel free to use the raise hand feature on zoom, utilize the chat, or unmute yourself when you're ready to speak.
- Do you have any questions before we begin?
- If you agree to participate and agree to being recorded, please indicate your consent now.

II. Current Community Need and Food Flow (20 minutes)

- To start, let's talk about the current situation. With the recent suspension and reduction of SNAP benefits, what changes are you seeing in community need? Are you seeing new clients or different frequencies of visits?
- How has this surge in demand affected your operations (e.g., your inventory, volunteer needs, open hours, or client-choice models)?
- Let's trace the path of the food you distribute. From your perspective, where does the food you handle come from (e.g., CHOW, retail donations, purchases) and where does it go?
- What are the primary challenges you face in managing your in-house inventory? (e.g., spoilage, lack of cold storage, food safety, items clients don't want).
- How does managing this food flow impact your organization's resources (e.g., storage capacity, transportation, volunteer time)?

III. Current Food Recovery and Distribution Practices (15 minutes)

- What is currently being done to recover surplus edible food in your sector? What types of food are you successfully recovering, and what types are hardest to get?
- What are the biggest successes and challenges of these current food recovery efforts?

- Are there any policies or regulations that make it difficult to accept donations or distribute food?
- How do current food recovery practices contribute to the community's food security?

IV. Identifying Opportunities for Improvement (20 minutes)

- Where are the biggest untapped opportunities for food recovery in Broome County?
- When you look at the food you recover versus the food your clients need, where are the biggest gaps? (e.g., fresh produce, protein, culturally appropriate foods).
- What kind of infrastructure or systems would make it easier to rescue and redistribute surplus food? (e.g., transportation, cold storage, communication networks) .
- What role could technology play in connecting food donors with your organizations?

V. Brainstorming System and Policy Changes (20 minutes)

- What are some practical changes that could be made to reduce food insecurity at its source, beyond the emergency food system?
- What policies at the local or state level could encourage more food donation and recovery, or better support your organizations in meeting this high level of community need?
- How can we build stronger partnerships between businesses that have surplus food and organizations like yours that serve those in need?

VI. Conclusion (5 minutes)

- Summary of key discussion points.
- Opportunity for any final reflections.
- Thank you and next steps.
 - Please feel free to email our team at seedsofchangeconsulting@gmail.com if additional thoughts or questions come up

Focus Group Guide: Public Health and Nutrition

Objective: To analyze the connections between the local food system and health outcomes, and to propose integrated interventions to improve community health, aligning with CARAT's Community Health and Well-being theme.

Target Audience: Healthcare professionals, public health officials, nutritionists, community health workers, and representatives from health-focused community organizations.

I. Introduction (5 minutes)

- Welcome. We are partnering with the Broome County Food Council to develop a county-wide Food Systems Plan. The broad goal of this plan is to find the best ways to support food access, reduce food waste, strengthen public health, and promote local agriculture.
- This discussion will last about 90 minutes. Your feedback is confidential, and we only ask that you listen openly and allow one person to speak at a time. There are no right or wrong answers. Feel free to use the raise hand feature on zoom, utilize the chat, or unmute yourself when you're ready to speak.
- Do you have any questions before we begin?
- If you agree to participate and agree to being recorded, please indicate your consent now.

II. Connecting Food Systems and Health Outcomes (20 minutes)

- From your professional viewpoint, what are the most pressing health challenges you see day-to-day among the clients or communities you serve?
- When you think about these diet-related health challenges, are there specific populations, age groups, or neighborhoods that come to mind as being disproportionately affected?
- What are the biggest barriers you see that prevent people from accessing healthy, affordable, and culturally appropriate food? [Probe: Think about cost, transportation, time, knowledge, or availability.]

III. Evaluating Existing Health and Nutrition Initiatives (20 minutes)

- Let's map out what's already happening. What key programs or initiatives (including your own) are currently working to improve food access and nutrition in the community?
- Thinking about these existing efforts, what's working well? Where are you seeing real success?
- On the flip side, where are the limitations or blind spots? What's not working as well as it could, or who is being missed?
- How well do your programs "talk" to each other?

- Probe: For example, how well are food programs (like WIC, SNAP, or pantries) connected with healthcare providers (like clinics or “food as medicine” programs)?
- Probe: Where do you see good collaboration, and where are the missed connections?

IV. Identifying Gaps and Opportunities for Integration (15 minutes)

- Where are the biggest gaps? If a family is struggling, where are they most likely to fall through the cracks between the food system and the healthcare system?
- Let’s talk about barriers at the system level. What prevents your organizations from collaborating more effectively? [Probe: This could be funding, policies, data sharing, competing priorities, or just not knowing who to call.]

V. Brainstorming Integrated Interventions (20 minutes)

- Let’s think creatively. What are some “outside-the-box” ideas that could tackle both food insecurity and poor health outcomes at the same time?
- There are many assets in the community—clinics, schools, food pantries, senior centers. How could we leverage these existing places and relationships to make a bigger, more unified impact on healthy eating?
- Here’s the “magic wand” question: If you could design one collaborative project between the food sector and the healthcare sector, and you knew it would be funded and supported, what would it look like?
- Before we wrap up, what is the single most important thing we need to do to build a better bridge between food and health in our community?

VI. Conclusion (5 minutes)

- Summary of key insights.
- Opportunity for final comments.
- Thank you and information on the project’s next steps.

Focus Group Guide: Farmland & Small Farm Development in Broome County

Objective: To assess the landscape for small and emerging farms in Broome County and to recommend strategies that support local food production and agricultural resilience, in line with CARAT's Natural Resource Management theme.

Target Audience: Small-scale farmers, new and aspiring farmers, representatives from agricultural support organizations, and local land use planners.

I. Introduction (5 minutes)

- Welcome. We are partnering with the Broome County Food Council to develop a county-wide Food Systems Plan. The broad goal of this plan is to find the best ways to support food access, reduce food waste, strengthen public health, and promote local agriculture.
- We are the Seeds of Change Consulting team, we are based in North Carolina but have a strong background in community needs assessments and food systems work. My name is Yasmeen and I will serve as lead facilitator for this conversation. LaShauna and Min Jae are here to assist with guiding our conversation.
- This discussion will last about 90 minutes. Your feedback is confidential, and we only ask that you listen openly and allow one person to speak at a time. There are no right or wrong answers. Do not feel like you have to answer every question, just where you would like to.
- Do you have any questions before we begin?
- If you consent to us audio recording this focus group, please indicate your consent now.
- **For each person** - please introduce yourself, tell us the name of your farm or organization, and briefly describe your role within the local agricultural community.

II. Understanding the Landscape (20 minutes)

- When you think about the *current state* of farming and local food in Broome County, what's one word or brief phrase that comes to mind for you?
- Starting on a positive note, what is one recent success or a point of pride you've seen in the local farm community in the past year?
- From your unique perspective—whether that's on the farm, at the market, dealing with policy, or supplying materials—what is one conversation topic that seems to come up over and over again right now?
- We're all here today to discuss the challenges and opportunities for building a stronger local food system. As we get started, what is one key issue you hope we make sure to cover in our conversation?

III. Land Use, Zoning, and Climate Resilience (20 minutes)

- How do current land use and zoning regulations in your municipality impact your farm operations? Do you find they are generally supportive or do they create barriers to what you want to accomplish?
- Looking ahead, what are your primary concerns regarding climate change? Are you more worried about things like intense rainfall and flooding, drought, or the emergence of new pests and diseases?
- Have you heard of planning tools like the Community & Agriculture Resilience Audit Tool (CARAT)? What features would a tool need to have to be genuinely useful for guiding agricultural planning in Broome County?
- What water quantity and climate action plans are in place, and how do they impact agricultural activities?
- How do zoning and permitting policies currently improve or hinder agricultural activities?

IV. The Broome-Tioga County Agricultural Connection (15 minutes)

- Describe the nature of the agricultural relationship between Broome and Tioga counties. Is it collaborative, competitive, or are they two separate worlds?
- For those who operate across county lines, what do those partnerships look like? For instance, are you selling at Tioga markets, sourcing supplies from there, or partnering on distribution?
- What are the untapped opportunities for greater collaboration between farmers and businesses across the two counties to enhance regional food system resilience?
- Conversely, what are the main drawbacks or barriers in the current cross-county landscape?

V. Brainstorming Supportive Strategies (20 minutes)

- If you could implement one new program or policy to support small and emerging farms in Broome County, what would it be? Examples might include land access programs, new grant opportunities, or more farmer training.
- What are the most effective ways we can strengthen the market for locally grown food? Should the focus be on direct-to-consumer sales, or on building connections with institutional buyers like schools and hospitals?
- What practical steps can we take to better support farmers in enhancing both local food production and climate resilience on their farms?
- How can we promote the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices to preserve ecosystems and farmland?

VI. Conclusion (5 minutes)

- Quick recap of the key themes and ideas we've discussed.
- Open floor for any final thoughts or suggestions that haven't been mentioned.
- Thank you for your time and expertise. We'll explain how this valuable feedback will be used to shape our recommendations.

Focus Group Guide: Strengthening Tioga County's Food & Farm Economy

Objective: To identify key challenges and opportunities facing Tioga County's food and farm sector, and to explore strategies for strengthening collaboration within the county and with regional partners, with an emphasis on building community resilience.

Target Audience: Small-scale farmers, new and aspiring farmers, local food business owners, representatives from agricultural support organizations, and local land use planners in Tioga County.

I. Introduction (5 minutes)

- Welcome. We are partnering with the Broome County Food Council to develop a county-wide Food Systems Plan. The broad goal of this plan is to find the best ways to support food access, reduce food waste, strengthen public health, and promote local agriculture.
- This discussion will last about 90 minutes. Your feedback is confidential, and we only ask that you listen openly and allow one person to speak at a time. There are no right or wrong answers. Feel free to use the raise hand feature on zoom, utilize the chat, or unmute yourself when you're ready to speak.
- Do you have any questions before we begin?
- If you agree to participate and agree to being recorded, please indicate your consent now.

II. The State of Our Local Food Community (20 minutes)

- When you think about the food and farming community in Tioga County, what are its biggest strengths?
- How do you currently connect with other farmers or local food businesses to share information or resources? What works well and what's missing?
- What are the most pressing shared challenges you see that affect everyone, from farmers to the people buying the food?
- How do these strengths and challenges impact the community's self-reliance in food?

III. Farmland & Small Farm Development (20 minutes)

- From your unique perspective—whether that's on the farm, at the market, dealing with policy, or supplying materials—what is one conversation topic that seems to come up over and over again right now?

- For the farmers and producers here, what are the biggest day-to-day challenges you face in running your business? [Think about hurdles related to land access, capital, labor, or getting your products to market.]
- Where are the biggest gaps in local infrastructure? Is there enough access to things like slaughterhouses, commercial kitchens, cold storage, or distribution hubs?
- How do current policies and practices contribute to protecting farmland and facilitating access to land for local producers in Tioga County?

IV. Partnership with Broome County (15 minutes)

- How would you describe the current business relationship between the agricultural communities in Tioga and Broome counties?
- Let's talk about the supply chain across Tioga & Broome County lines. Who is buying and what are they buying?
- Are farmers selling to markets or restaurants in Broome County? Do you rely on them for processing or distribution services?
- What are the untapped opportunities for greater collaboration between farmers and businesses across the two counties to enhance regional food system resilience?
- What are the main benefits of this relationship between Tioga & Broome? Are there any drawbacks or areas for improvement in terms of regional food system resilience?

V. Brainstorming: A Stronger Food Network for Tioga County (20 minutes)

- Looking inward, how could we strengthen the market for food produced in Tioga County?
- If a group like a food council existed in Tioga County, what are the top one or two problems it should try to solve first?
- Thinking about the future, what actionable steps can be taken to ensure farms remain profitable and prepared for challenges? [like extreme weather, drought, flooding, SNAP cuts for buyers]

VI. Conclusion (5 minutes)

- Recap of major themes and action items.
- Opportunity for any final thoughts or suggestions.
- Thank you for your time and expertise and an outline of how this feedback will be used.
 - Please feel free to email our team at seedsofchangeconsulting@gmail.com if additional thoughts or questions come up

Appendix D: Resources & References

This section provides links to key policies, programs, frameworks, and data sources referenced throughout this assessment.

Federal Policy & Legislation

- [Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act](#): Federal liability protection for good-faith food donors
- [Local Farmers Feeding our Communities Act](#): Federal legislation to codify and expand local food purchasing programs (cosponsored by Congressman Josh Riley)
- [SNAP \(Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program\)](#): Federal nutrition assistance program information

New York State Policy & Programs

- [NYS Food Donation and Food Scrap Recycling Law](#): Requires large food waste generators to donate edible food and recycle food scraps
- [NYS Farm Donations to Food Pantries Tax Credit](#): Tax credit (25% of fair market value, up to \$5,000/year) for farmers who donate to food pantries
- [NYS Agricultural Assessment Program](#): Property tax relief for qualifying farmland based on agricultural use value rather than development value
- [NYS Farmers' School Tax Credit](#): Refundable income tax credit for school district property taxes paid on qualified agricultural property
- [NYS Tax Basics for Farmers \(Overview Page\)](#): Comprehensive guide to all tax credits and exemptions available to NYS farmers
- [NYS Department of Agriculture - Tax Credits and Agricultural Assessments](#): Overview of agricultural tax programs administered by NYS Ag & Markets
- [NYS Department of Environmental Conservation - Food Waste Reduction](#): Resources for businesses for food waste reduction strategies; information on methane reduction from landfills

Frameworks & Tools

- [ALICE \(Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed\)](#): United Way framework for identifying households above poverty but below financial stability
- [United Way of Broome County - ALICE Data](#): Local ALICE data and resources
- [CARAT \(Community & Agriculture Resilience Audit Tool\)](#): North American Food Systems Network tool for assessing agricultural resilience

Economic Data Sources

- [New York State Community Action Association - 2025 Poverty Report](#): County-level poverty, ALICE, income, and demographic data

Cross-County Resources

- Getthere (formerly Broome-Tioga Mobility Management Project): Cross-county transportation coordination initiative operated by the Rural Health Network of South Central New York. Serves Broome, Chenango, Delaware, Otsego, and Tioga Counties with transportation assistance, travel training, and mobility management.
 - Call Center: 855-373-4040
 - [Rural Health Network of SCNY](#)
 - [Tioga County resource page](#)
- [511NY Broome-Tioga Rideshare](#): Regional transportation options and rideshare resources
- Move Together NY: Regional mobility management program supporting cross-county transportation access in rural areas (Cornell Cooperative Extension Tompkins County / Way2Go initiative collaborating with Broome and Tioga)

Additional Data Sources

- U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts
 - [Broome County](#)
 - [Tioga County](#)
- Federal Reserve Economic Data (FRED) Median household income time series data
 - [Broome County](#)
 - [Tioga County](#)