



Testimony of City Harvest
Before the New York City Council General Welfare Committee
Budget and Oversight Hearing on the Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027

March 17, 2026

ASKS:

- 1. Strengthen and protect New York City's food pantry system**
- 2. Fully fund HRA SNAP enrollment operations and SNAP outreach programming**
- 3. Restore access to healthy grocery incentive programs**

Thank you, Chairwoman Crystal Hudson and members of the General Welfare Committee, for holding today's hearing on New York City's Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027. My name is Carlos Rodriguez, and I am the President at City Harvest, New York's first and largest food rescue organization.

First, I want to thank the City Council for its steadfast support of City Harvest over the years. Year after year, we have been able to rescue millions of pounds of food, mostly fresh produce, and deliver it free of charge to a network of 400 food pantries across our city. These efforts are only possible because of a community of food justice leaders who run New York's pantry system, our hardworking staff and union drivers who pack our fleet of trucks and navigate our city's streets to pick up and deliver food, thousands of generous food donors ranging from restaurants in Manhattan to farmlands up the Hudson, and leaders in government who have been responsive to the community's needs. This year, we will deliver over 86 million pounds of food to millions of New Yorkers. We thank the City Council for its continued support in that effort, including its investments in the Feeding Our Communities Initiative established last year.

As an organization that has been fighting hunger for over 40 years, it is clear to us that this year is not business as usual. In City Harvest's network of 400 pantry programs across New York City,

we are seeing over 1 million additional pantry visits per month, an 87 percent increase compared to pre-COVID data from 2019.¹

These conditions reflect longstanding affordability challenges in our city. However, we are now at a crossroads where these conditions are all but certain to worsen due to decisions at the federal level. With food prices destabilized, historic federal cuts to SNAP and healthcare being realized, and other federal policy choices threatening affordability, this moment requires a bold response from both community organizations and government.

City Harvest has already taken significant steps in response to this growing need. Since 2019, we have increased the food we distribute by over 30 percent, with a focus on high-need neighborhoods with pantry food supply gaps and at-risk populations. We now procure over 6 million pounds of local food from New York State, more than any other NYC-based organization brings in from upstate farms. In addition, we have expanded our policy and advocacy work to deepen engagement between pantry leaders and government.

However, charity alone cannot and should not be expected to replace effective and equitable public policy. For those reasons and more, we stand in alignment with our network of food pantries and dozens of food system leaders in advocating for the FY2027 Budget to include the following investments:

Strengthen and protect New York City's emergency food system

Food banks and food pantries remain at the forefront of ensuring that New Yorkers have immediate and dignified access to food. Currently, as many as 250 million meals a year are at risk of being lost across New York City due to HR1's historic cuts to SNAP, potentially reaching its peak in FY2029 when the federal government begins to penalize states for SNAP payment errors by shifting upwards of \$1.2 billion in expenses onto New York State. When SNAP falls short, or when families find themselves ineligible, they turn to the emergency food system for support. As the federal government scales back key safety net programs, it is critical that New York City strengthens its investments in food security.

That is why we are asking the city to increase funding for the Community Food Connection (CFC) program from \$74.5 million to \$100 million. More than 700 food pantries rely on this program to provide high-quality food for free distribution to people in need.² City Harvest also leverages this program to supplement the food we distribute through our Mobile Markets, many of which operate at New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) centers across the five

¹ City Harvest analysis of FeedNYC data

² <https://www.nyc.gov/site/hra/help/food-assistance.page>

boroughs. A robust CFC program is essential to stabilizing New York's emergency food system in the years to come.

In addition to adequately funding CFC, we are advocating for the City Council to maintain \$26.89 million in funding for discretionary food security initiatives. This includes \$15 million for the Feeding Our Communities Initiative, \$8.26 million for the Food Pantry Initiative, \$2.13 million for the Access to Healthy Food and Nutritional Education Initiative, and \$1.5 million for the Food Access and Benefits Initiative. In total, this amounts to \$72.42 per year for each New Yorker experiencing food insecurity — a modest investment that can go further in scale and reach. Together, these programs are critical to City Harvest's ability to source high-quality and culturally responsive foods and distribute those resources equitably across our diverse network of community-centered pantries.

Fully fund HRA SNAP enrollment operations and outreach

HR1, the federal spending package signed into law on July 4, 2025, cuts SNAP by over \$186 billion nationwide. These cuts come through a number of changes that narrow eligibility, expand work-reporting requirements, modify how benefit allotments are calculated, and shift costs to local government. For New York State, those cost shifts could reach as much as \$1.2 billion.

In response, City Harvest has taken steps to prepare for the impact of these changes. We have reimagined our operational targets to respond directly to the 250 million meals at risk of being lost at the height of HR1's implementation. We have also partnered with the Human Resources Administration (HRA) to provide training to over 200 pantry leaders who plan to offer volunteer opportunities for an expanded group of nearly 200,000 additional New York City residents who may need to meet new work-reporting requirements to receive SNAP.

City government must do more to meet this moment. HRA will face an estimated \$100 million increase in SNAP administrative costs as a direct result of HR1 increasing the local administrative cost share from 50 percent to 75 percent. These funds represent the bare minimum needed to keep the program operating at a steady state. Any underfunding of SNAP administration or outreach could drive increased demand for emergency food at a level that charitable organizations cannot absorb in place of a strong nutrition safety net.

Restore access to healthy grocery incentive programs

Programs like Groceries to Go and Get the Good Stuff are helping tens of thousands of New Yorkers afford fresh, healthy food, reaching more than 4,000 patients through NYC Health + Hospitals' Groceries to Go program and more than 19,000 New Yorkers through Get the Good

Stuff, demonstrating that targeted nutrition incentives can improve health while helping families stretch their food budgets.³

Get the Good Stuff matches up to \$10 per day for every \$10 in SNAP that a household spends on produce at select stores. Groceries to Go provides a 50 percent discount, or up to \$30 per month in grocery credits, when participants purchase produce at over 25 participating grocers.⁴ While Get the Good Stuff primarily serves SNAP participants, Groceries to Go supports NYC Health and Hospitals patients who are experiencing food insecurity and managing chronic conditions such as hypertension or diabetes.

These programs directly address the connection between food and health by leveraging the NYC Health and Hospitals network to connect eligible New Yorkers with meaningful grocery support. In the context of HR1 cutting \$186 billion from families' grocery budgets through changes to SNAP, Groceries to Go represents a strong city model for strengthening food access and food agency.

Despite their success, the FY2027 Preliminary Budget did not restore \$3.2 million for Groceries to Go and excluded funding for Get the Good Stuff. We respectfully request that the Council ensure both programs are restored in the final budget. Providing New Yorkers with additional grocery support is urgent, particularly as SNAP continues to be weakened by decisions at the federal level.

About City Harvest's Strategy Today

City Harvest rescues and delivers food free of charge to more than 400 food pantries, soup kitchens, and community partners across the five boroughs, distributing more than 86 million pounds of food each year, or over 230,000 pounds every day. Beyond food delivery, we strengthen pantry capacity by providing grants and technical support for cold storage, equipment, staffing, and technology so organizations can safely store and distribute more food to their neighbors. We also regularly survey our partner network and program participants to understand operational challenges, food preferences, and emerging needs.

City Harvest pairs this feedback with quantitative data and research to ensure our food distribution strategy, programs, and advocacy respond directly to community needs. Each year, we analyze neighborhood-level data, including research from the New York City Mayor's Office of Food Policy, to identify priority neighborhoods where food insecurity is high, but emergency

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https://www.nyc.gov/assets/foodpolicy/downloads/pdf/NYC_FoodReport_2025.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com

⁴ <https://www.nyc.gov/site/doh/health/health-topics/groceries-to-go.page>

food resources are limited. In response, we direct additional food, recruit new partners, and invest in local capacity so that communities with the greatest unmet need receive more support. We also work to ensure that the food we distribute reflects neighbors' cultural preferences and religious dietary requirements.

Today, pantry partners across the city are deeply concerned about federal cuts to SNAP. With as many as 250 million meals annually at risk in New York due to these historic reductions, food banks and pantries cannot fill the gap alone. In response, City Harvest has begun partnering with local government and other anti-hunger organizations to help families navigate immediate policy changes, including expanded ABAWD work-reporting requirements that put 200,000 New Yorkers at risk of losing SNAP in 2026. This work highlights the importance of continued partnership with the City to ensure community food programs have the resources needed in this new SNAP reality.

Conclusion

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. City Harvest is proud to work alongside the City Council, our network of food pantries, and community partners to respond to rising hunger across New York City. As the need for food assistance continues to grow and federal policy changes place additional pressure on families, it is critical that the City strengthen the systems that help New Yorkers access food with dignity.

Today, we urge the Council to protect and strengthen the emergency food system through increased funding for Community Food Connection and continued support for discretionary food security initiatives, fully fund SNAP enrollment and outreach operations at HRA, and restore access to healthy grocery incentive programs such as Groceries to Go and Get the Good Stuff.

We look forward to continuing to collaborate with the Council to ensure that New Yorkers have reliable access to food and that our city's food system remains strong and responsive in the face of growing challenges.

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