

# Nourish Austin

## A Proposal to Address Food Insecurity and Create a More Resilient Austin

Food insecurity is a complex issue, caused by a variety of factors that include poverty, racism, health and inequities in education and housing. To address food insecurity in our community, we need to address its root causes, not just its symptoms. With the passage of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), Austin and Travis County have an opportunity to make investments in community-informed, community-designed, and community-led solutions that transform our communities' relationships to food and have a positive impact on the local food system for generations to come. Addressing food insecurity and improving food access will look different for each of Austin's diverse and varied neighborhoods, but key to any strategy is the need to ensure food sovereignty for all residents, and guarantee access to food as a human right.

In response to Council Resolution 20210325-111, staff who work on food systems initiatives and programs from the Economic Development Department, the Office of Sustainability, and Austin Public Health came together to identify a framework for transformative change and strategies outlined in this proposal. Together, staff developed Nourish Austin as a holistic package of interdependent recommendations, composed of planning initiatives, immediate actions, and longer term projects.

We acknowledge that true transformation occurs when those directly impacted are at the table to help direct solutions and we stress the importance of funding opportunities for community engagement and empowerment in the implementation of the proposed strategies. In order to be successful and equitable, further development of each strategy must be rooted in trauma-informed engagement processes, which centers dignity, trust, relationship-building. The recommendations must also be implemented in ways that prioritize communities, such as people experiencing homelessness, low-income communities, and communities of color, who have experienced centuries of discrimination and disinvestment, as these are the conditions that have perpetuated food access disparities.

The following recommendations are mutually reinforcing, requiring extensive coordination and collaboration across City departments, between City staff and County staff, and in partnership with community residents, businesses, nonprofits, foundations, and other stakeholders. The overall budget needed for implementation is \$103.6 million and requires 8 FTE staff (including contract specialists, program managers, and program coordinators), including 1 FTE to support contract development and execution. Nourish Austin proposes a variety of solutions to end food insecurity that can be implemented beginning in the current fiscal year (FY21-22) and that will have an enduring positive impact on our community.

## Summary of Nourish Austin Recommendations

Detailed recommendations can be found starting on page 9.

<u>Action Area</u>	<u>Recommendation</u>	<u>Budget Impact</u>	<u>Additional Staff Needed</u>	<u>Approximate Implementation Timeline</u>	<u>Lead Department(s)</u>
1. <b>Respond</b> to ongoing food access needs	A: Continue and evolve emergency feeding programs	\$10 million	2 FTE (grant-funded for 3 years)	Short-term (within FY21 and 22)	APH
	B: Increase access to groceries via innovative distribution models	\$6 million		Short-term (within FY21 and 22)	APH and OOS
2. <b>Prepare</b> for food access needs in advance of future disasters and disruptions	A: Provide food at resiliency hubs	\$5 million		Short-term (within FY21 and 22)	EDD and OOS
	B: Develop contracts for emergency food resources during disasters and other disruptions	\$100,000		Short-term (within FY21 and 22)	APH and OOS
3. <b>Plan</b> for a more equitable and resilient regional food system	A: Develop a regional food systems plan and implementation framework	\$2 million	0.5 FTE (grant-funded for 3 years, combined with 5E)	Medium-term (FY22-FY24)	OOS
4. <b>Invest</b> in the food system in ways that increase food access,	A: Launch a regional Good Food Fund	\$10 million	0.5 FTE (grant-funded for 3 years)	Short-term (within FY21 and 22)	EDD
	B: Support the development of non-profit and cooperatively-owned grocery	\$20 million	0.5 FTE (grant-funded for 3 years)	Long-term (FY21-FY30)	EDD and OOS

community resilience, and equitable prosperity	stores				
	C: Incentivize existing retailers to sell more healthy food items	\$2 million	0.5 FTE (grant-funded for 3 years, combined with #5A)	Short-term (within FY21 and 22)	EDD and APH
	D: Plan and build a network of regional food hubs	\$30 million	1 FTE (permanent)	Long-term (FY21-FY30)	EDD and OOS
	E: Increase local food production and affordability	\$5 million	0.5 FTE (grant-funded for 3 years, combined with 3A)	Medium-term (FY22-FY24)	OOS
5. <b>Strengthen</b> the power of individuals and households to purchase food	A: Expand use of SNAP/WIC benefits, particularly at large retailers	\$7.5 million	0.5 FTE (grant-funded for 3 years, combined with #4C)	Medium-term (FY22-FY24)	APH
	B: Support living wage jobs and career development in the food sector	\$6 million	1 FTE (permanent)	Short-term (FY21-23)	EDD and OOS
Overall Contract Management & Coordination	Social service contract specialist who works exclusively on Nourish Austin related contracts, ensures compliance with ARPA and other funding sources guidelines, and aids in reporting		1 FTE (permanent)		Financial Services
Total		\$103.6 million	8 FTE (5 grant-funded, 3 permanent)		

## Food Insecurity & Transformative Change

Food insecurity, a situation in which individuals do not have access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food, is a social determinant of health with a variety of underlying causes and symptoms. In Austin, 16% of families in Travis County experienced food insecurity pre-pandemic.<sup>1</sup> While that number dropped in 2018, potentially due to the displacement of poor communities caused by the increase in housing prices in Travis County, research indicates that the COVID19 pandemic has accelerated food insecurity rates nationally and in our region.<sup>2</sup> Feeding America 2020 projections indicate 18 percent of adults in Travis County are food insecure, up from 13 percent in 2018. Childhood food insecurity increased by 53% from 2018 to 2020<sup>3</sup>.

Food access is influenced by a variety of factors affecting a household's ability to purchase healthy, affordable, and culturally appropriate food – including income, health, housing, and transportation. Because of disinvestment and historic and ongoing institutional racism, Black residents of Travis County are twice as likely to live in areas that face the highest barriers to healthy food access compared to non-Hispanic whites and Asian-Americans, while one in ten Latinx households in Austin suffer from food insecurity.<sup>4</sup> For many residents who do live in areas with access to healthy food, safe and reliable transportation remain barriers because of the unavailability of sidewalks, bike lanes, reliable transit, or a personal vehicle. In Austin and Travis County, these barriers to healthy food access are felt most acutely by those living in the Eastern Crescent and rural Travis County.

Poverty and an inability to purchase food, even when it is physically accessible, is another contributing factor to food insecurity. In 2019, 13.6 percent of all Texans lived in poverty, higher than the national rate of 10.6 percent. That number is expected to increase due to widespread unemployment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Center for Public Policy Priorities, Black and Hispanic Texans are more than twice as likely to live below the poverty line as white Texans. On average, white and Asian-American households in Austin earn more than double the annual income (\$88,940 and \$105,435, respectively) than African-American and Hispanic households do (\$46,951 and \$51,887, respectively), according to 2018 American Community Survey data.<sup>5</sup> Increasing residents' ability to afford healthy, culturally appropriate food and other basic needs is a fundamental component of food access and food security.

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<sup>1</sup> "State of the Food System Report" (Office of Sustainability, City of Austin, April 2015), [https://austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Sustainability/AustinFoodReport050115\\_-\\_FINAL.pdf](https://austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Sustainability/AustinFoodReport050115_-_FINAL.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> "Resident Movement: An Exploration of Population Trends in Travis County" (Travis County Health and Human Services, Fall 2019), [https://www.traviscountytx.gov/images/health\\_human\\_services/Docs/final-report-2013-2017-resident-movement.pdf](https://www.traviscountytx.gov/images/health_human_services/Docs/final-report-2013-2017-resident-movement.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Gundersen, C., A. Dewey, E. Engelhard, M. Strayer & L. Lapinski. Map the Meal Gap 2020: A Report on County and Congressional District Food Insecurity and County Food Cost in the United States in 2018. Feeding America, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Food Access in Austin. Office of Sustainability, 2018. Accessed April 22 2021. <https://austin.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=ddf4807ce0ad4304a8fef38f769ab14b>

<sup>5</sup> Weber, Andrew. "Austin Still Struggles With Pay Equity, Rent Costs And High Rates Of Uninsured Children" September 30 2019. <https://www.kut.org/austin/2019-09-30/austin-still-struggles-with-pay-equity-rent-costs-and-high-rates-of-uninsured-children>

Food insecurity also contributes to chronic health conditions including obesity, diabetes, hypertension, anemia, developmental delays in children and mental health issues such as depression, anxiety and even PTSD. There is a growing body of experts that acknowledge that food insecurity also contributes to trauma, or ‘toxic stress’, which further causes long-term physical and mental harm. This trauma can stem from difficult choices that low-income and food-insecure parents are forced to make between buying food and other necessities such as housing and transportation.

Disasters and other disruptive events similarly heighten food insecurity and related traumas for the people who already experience it, or cause otherwise food secure people to lose access to food temporarily. People experiencing any of the barriers to food access mentioned above tend to experience them even more acutely during shocks and stressors such as weather-related disasters, extreme heat or cold, or other times of instability. When such events occur, people who normally have adequate access to healthy and nutritious food experience times of temporary food insecurity, due to supply chain disruptions and other emergency expenses (transportation, damage to housing, injury, etc.). During recent Winter Storm Uri, thousands of city residents went without power for several days and watched their food spoil, while food banks and other sources of emergency food temporarily were unable to maintain operations. Many low-income residents lost days of work and struggled to purchase food, adding to the trauma and stress caused by the other effects of the storm. As disruptive and extreme weather events will likely increase in the future, the City and its partners can strengthen residents’ resilience and swift recovery by building and strengthening disaster-resilient food systems infrastructure, through investments in long-term nonperishable food storage in designated resilience hubs.

### **Towards Food Sovereignty**

Addressing food insecurity and improving food access will look different for each of Austin’s diverse and varied communities. Ensuring food sovereignty for all residents is a critical component to ensure transformative change and end food insecurity.

According to the U.S. Food Sovereignty Alliance, food sovereignty is the right for all people to have access to healthy and culturally appropriate food, sustainably produced via food and agriculture systems that they are able to choose, design, and implement. Food sovereignty puts at the forefront the needs of those who produce, distribute, and consume food - those who are usually most negatively affected by our current food system and those most vulnerable to shocks, stressors, and disasters.<sup>6</sup> Transformative change therefore entails adjusting City and County policy and allocating public resources in ways that support communities to develop solutions that work to change the conditions currently causing food insecurity and associated traumas, ensuring that all residents are able to produce and consume food in ways that meet their cultural, social, nutritional, and economic needs.

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<sup>6</sup> “What Is Food Sovereignty.” U.S. Food Sovereignty Alliance. Accessed April 22 2021.  
<http://usfoodsovereigntyalliance.org/what-is-food-sovereignty/>

## How We Developed These Recommendations

In response to Council Resolution 20210325-111, staff who work on food systems initiatives and programs from the Economic Development Department, the Office of Sustainability, and Austin Public Health came together to identify a framework for transformative change and strategies outlined in this proposal. We acknowledge that true transformation occurs when those directly impacted are at the table to help direct solutions and we hope to underscore the importance of providing opportunities for community engagement and empowerment in the implementation of the proposed strategies.

Since the work began on the City's Healthy Food Access Initiative in 2016, city staff have conducted broad-reaching community engagement, both in daily interactions with stakeholders, regional partners, and community residents, as well as via formal engagement with the Austin Travis County Food Policy Board and other relevant bodies.<sup>7</sup>

Staff have also been in close contact with the leaders of food access initiatives in peer cities across the state and continent (San Antonio, Houston, Dallas, Washington, D.C., New York City, Baltimore, Portland, OR, and Seattle, among others), researching and identifying best practices that may be suitable for implementation here. In our analysis of peer cities' programs, staff reviewed implementation, impact and considered a comparison to Austin's food system.

Working collaboratively, staff identified more than 50 ideas that were evaluated using the following criteria: transformational potential, opportunities for collaboration, community empowerment, equity and resilience, and feasibility (including the ability to leverage current programming or other sources of funding). This prioritization process resulted in a shortlist of ideas that met all of the criteria. Staff determined that these key recommendations are the best methods for ending food insecurity and ensuring food sovereignty for the most marginalized and negatively affected by our current food system:

1. **Respond** to ongoing food access needs, exacerbated by the COVID19 pandemic and Winter Storm Uri
2. **Prepare** for food access needs in advance of future disasters and disruptions
3. **Plan** for a better regional food system by co-creating with residents a vision for achieving food sovereignty
4. **Invest** in the food system in ways that increase food access, community resilience, and equitable economic prosperity
5. **Strengthen** the power of individuals and households to purchase healthy food

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<sup>7</sup> "Response to Food Access Resolution 20160303-020: Healthy Food Access Initiative." Memo to Mayor and Council. Austin, TX. July 27 2016. [http://austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Sustainability/07-27-16\\_Memo\\_to\\_MC\\_re\\_Response\\_to\\_Food\\_Access\\_Resolution\\_20160303-020\\_....pdf](http://austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Sustainability/07-27-16_Memo_to_MC_re_Response_to_Food_Access_Resolution_20160303-020_....pdf)

## **Engagement, Empowerment, and Accountability**

Nourish Austin presents a way of realizing the City's goal to invest in and significantly improve the quality of life of Black communities and communities of color in Austin, as described most recently in [Resolution 20210304-067](#), as well as for other communities such as people experiencing homelessness.

Due to historic and systemic racism, including by the City of Austin and other institutions, food insecurity is experienced more deeply by and within communities of color. Nourish Austin's recommendations must be developed and implemented in ways that end racial disparities in accessing food, jobs, and other needs, as well as eradicate the barriers that people of color experience in starting businesses and building individual and community wealth.

In addition, staff acknowledge that the ongoing effects of historic policies and practices have caused communities of color and other impacted communities to distrust public institutions such as the City of Austin. Utilizing a trauma-informed policy framework to implement these recommendations acknowledges this distrust, promotes healing, and prioritizes the experiences of those that are directly impacted by the negative externalities of the food system - so that we may avoid re-traumatization through both policy development and outcomes. This framework further emphasizes transparency, empowerment, and relationship building in the engagement and implementation process. By centering the needs of those directly impacted and empowering community members to lead the design and implementation of these recommendations, Nourish Austin hopes to address and mitigate gentrification and displacement that have and could result from unjust policy decisions and economic development, including in the food sector.

Staff propose the following process be used when implementing each recommendation:

1. engage with individuals, households, and communities to understand and document how food insecurity currently affects them in the context of the proposed recommendation, prioritizing work with those who are currently most negatively affected by the current food system and those who most acutely experience food insecurity on a regular basis;
2. empower those individuals, households, and communities to co-create and co-design the proposed solutions in ways that best addresses their needs and helps to shape the food system they want to see;
3. implement those proposed solutions by strategically investing in areas of most need and highest impact;
4. measure implementation in clear and transparent ways that hold the City and its partners accountable to the needs of those most negatively affected by the current food system.

To successfully enact this process for each of the Nourish Austin recommendations, it is necessary to pay both community engagement specialists and community members for their expertise and time.

### **Alignment With Other Council Priorities for American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funds**

As described above, food insecurity is a complicated issue influenced by many factors. Successfully addressing food insecurity and moving towards food sovereignty necessitates careful coordination between these strategies and those addressing other issues related to homelessness, inadequate access to childcare, and the lack of high-quality jobs for working-class people.

Recommendations #1 and #2 - to **Respond** to immediate food access needs and to **Prepare** for future disaster-related food emergencies - will utilize funding to specifically and immediately address the needs of people experiencing homelessness (among other targeted populations) and provide a safety net for our community's most vulnerable residents. Recommendation #5 - to **Strengthen** household purchasing power - will help make food more affordable for many residents and provide improved pathways for living wage jobs in the food sector, supporting individuals in finding sustainable employment opportunities.

Many residents are burdened by the high cost of housing, transportation, childcare and other necessities, often having to make difficult choices between purchasing food or other life-sustaining necessities. Recommendations #4 and #5 - to strategically **Invest** in food system infrastructure and to **Strengthen** household purchasing power - will help put more money into people's pockets by providing access to more affordable high quality food, better jobs and by doubling the purchasing power of food stamps and similar benefits. These solutions will empower families to meet their most pressing needs by being able to make their own choices when it comes to buying and preparing food. An increase in the use and effectiveness of SNAP benefits would not only improve food security but would further stimulate the City's food economy by increasing the amount recipients can spend at food retailers and Austin's 17 farmers markets.'

Opportunities also exist to increase the quality and pay of local jobs in the food sector, providing more opportunities for career-building and business ownership for working-class Austinites. The food industry is the largest employment sector in the US, accounting for 14 percent of the US workforce. Over 1 million people are employed in food preparation or service across Texas, providing critical labor that is the foundation of the local food service industry. Food service workers are critically important to Austin's status as a local music, entertainment, and tourism destination, yet they earn an average annual wage of under \$25,000. There are also significant wage gaps across gender and racial demographics. Recommendations #2, #4 and #5 - **Prepare** for future disaster-related food emergencies, **Invest** in food systems infrastructure and community wealth building, and **Strengthen** household purchasing power - all provide mechanisms for incentivizing higher-wage jobs in the food sector that provide employee benefits, stability, and benefits to the community in the form of increased food sustainability and high-quality meals for those in need. City initiatives in this arena can help move the needle on food sector jobs in the private sector, while also providing a way to directly increase food access for those who need it.



## **Measuring Success**

Nourish Austin’s success will be measured in relation to the goals and priorities of the City of Austin as identified in Imagine Austin and Strategic Directions 2023, as well as by the metrics to be identified via the various community engagement processes identified for each recommendation and the Regional Food System Plan (Recommendation #3A). Nourish Austin strategies will influence at least three strategic outcomes of SD23: Economic Opportunity and Affordability, Health & Environment, and Government that Works for All. In addition to SD23 strategies, each recommendation’s success can be measured in relation to specific projected outcomes as shown in the table below.

<u>Action Area</u>	<u>Recommendation</u>	<u>Output Measure</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Respond</b> to ongoing food access needs</li> </ul>	1A: Continue and evolve emergency feeding programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Distribute at least 1 million meals annually</li> <li>A minimum of \$3M directed to local food businesses who provide living wages to employees</li> </ul>
	1B: Increase access to groceries via innovative distribution models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Serve a minimum of 1,000 families annually</li> <li>Provide over 2,000 deliveries representing approximately over 168,000 meals</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Prepare</b> for food access needs in advance of future disasters and disruptions</li> </ul>	2A: Provide food at resiliency hubs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Potential to provide 25,000 prepared meals and 25,000 food boxes per year</li> </ul>
	2B: Develop contracts for emergency food resources during disasters and other disruptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage 25,000 community members and relevant for-profit and non-profit organizations in the development of the plan</li> <li>Completed Emergency Food Access Plan appendix to the Emergency Food Access Plan</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Plan</b> for a more equitable and resilient regional food system</li> </ul>	3A: Develop a regional food systems plan and implementation framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>From across central Texas, engage at least 50,000 community members, elected officials, and relevant for-profit and nonprofit food supply chain stakeholders in the plan</li> <li>Annual Regional Food Systems Summit</li> <li>Completed Austin-area Regional Food Systems Plan</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Invest</b> in the food system in ways that increase food access, community resilience, and equitable prosperity</li> </ul>	4A: Launch a regional Good Food Fund	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assist at least 150 local food businesses and nonprofit organizations, including food banks, in the development of the fund</li> <li>Create and retain at least 300 jobs at existing or new food sector establishments</li> <li>Leverage community and philanthropic donations, private investment, and other resources for at least half of the fund's projects</li> </ul>
	4B: Support the development of non-profit and cooperatively-owned grocery stores	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage at least 20,000 residents in the Eastern crescent and all relevant food system stakeholders in the development</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plan, design, build, and begin operations of at least 1 new community grocery store in an area lacking healthy food retail</li> <li>Leverage community and philanthropic donations, private investment, and other resources to cover at least half of the overall project costs</li> </ul>
	4C: Incentivize existing retailers to sell more healthy food items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support increased sales of fresh produce and other healthy food items and/or restaurants across the City's Eastern Crescent (5 stores per year)</li> <li>5 full-store or restaurant renovations (1-2 per year)</li> <li>At least 50 nutritional classes or outreach events at or in partnership with local organizations</li> </ul>
	4D: Plan and build a network of regional food hubs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage at least 20,000 residents in the Eastern crescent and all relevant supply chain stakeholders in the development</li> <li>Plan, design, build, and begin operations of at least 1 regional food hub with storage and packing space</li> <li>Support at least 170 local and regional food businesses and provide resources to community and social service organizations</li> <li>Distribute at least 10 million pounds of regionally-produced produce annually</li> <li>Support at least 50 new full-time jobs per year</li> <li>Leverage community and philanthropic donations, private investment, and other resources to cover at least half of the overall project costs</li> <li>A feasibility study and detailed business plan for the food hub(s) that includes generation and long-term operability</li> </ul>
	4E: Increase local food production and affordability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage relevant for-profit and nonprofit food production stakeholders</li> <li>Completed Austin-area Urban Farm Master Plan</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Strengthen</b> the power of individuals and households to purchase food</li> </ul>	5A: Expand use of SNAP/WIC benefits, particularly at large retailers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement SNAP/EBT incentive program in partnership with at least 4 large retailers</li> <li>Assist at least 30,000 individuals in completing applications for SNAP/WIC (10,000 individuals per year)</li> </ul>

	5B: Support living wage jobs and career development in the food sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Train and employ at least 300 individuals over 3 years</li> <li>• All trainees are paid \$15/hr or higher</li> </ul>
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## Prioritization and Implementation Timeline

Nourish Austin recommendations reflect a prioritization of actions selected from more than 50 strategies identified via ongoing community engagement, Council resolutions and Boards and Commission priorities, and best practices in other cities and places. To transform food insecurity in Austin, we must first **Respond** to ongoing food access needs and **Prepare** for future disasters; next we must work together to **Plan** a more equitable and sustainable food system; and finally we must strategically **Invest** in food systems infrastructure and projects that will **Strengthen** the purchasing power and incomes of individuals and households. With the assistance of additional staff, the City can begin work on each of these recommendations in the current fiscal year. While some of the recommendations may take a few more years to come to be implemented, many can be accomplished by the beginning of FY22-23. Strategies will last from a minimum of 3 years (for example, the emergency feeding programs and the expansion of SNAP/WIC benefits at retailers) to many decades (the Good Food Fund, regional food hubs, and non-profit/co-op grocery stores).

	Short-term \$40.1M FY 21-22	Mid-term \$13.5M FY 22-24	Long-term \$50M FY 25+
<b>RESPOND</b>	1A: Continue and evolve emergency feeding programs 1B: Increase access to groceries via innovative distribution models		
<b>PREPARE</b>	2A: Provide food at resiliency hubs 2B: Develop contracts for emergency food resources during disasters and other disruptions		
<b>PLAN</b>	3A: Develop a regional food systems plan and implementation framework		
<b>INVEST</b>	4A: Launch a regional Good Food Fund 4C: Incentivize existing retailers to sell more healthy food items 4E: Increase local food production and affordability 4B: Support the development of non-profit and cooperatively-owned grocery stores 4D: Plan and build a network of regional food hubs		
<b>STRENGTHEN</b>	5B: Support living wage jobs and career development in the food sector 5A: Expand use of SNAP/WIC benefits, particularly at large retailers		

According to Feeding America, an investment of approximately \$87 million would be required to meet unmet food needs at 2018 food insecurity rates and address the annual food budget shortfall for Travis County but does not account for the projected 38 percent increase in the food security rate for 2020.<sup>8</sup> Conditions were further exacerbated by Winter Storm Uri but we do not have current local projections

<sup>8</sup> Gundersen, C., A. Dewey, E. Engelhard, M. Strayer & L. Lapinski. Map the Meal Gap 2020: A Report on County and Congressional District Food Insecurity and County Food Cost in the United States in 2018. Feeding America, 2020.

for how this impacted the food insecurity rate for 2021. The suite of recommendations that follow work in tandem to address the complex web of conditions that impact our community's ability to thrive, and would require an overall investment of \$103.6 million. Nourish Austin could be successfully funded by a combination of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars combined with funding from federal programs (such as those administered by the Small Business Administration, the Economic Development Administration, the US Department of Agriculture, and Housing and Urban Development) and philanthropic donations.

# Nourish Austin: Recommendations

## 1. Respond to targeted and ongoing food access needs, exacerbated by the COVID19 pandemic and Winter Storm Uri

Recommendation 1A: Continue and evolve emergency feeding programs that provide meals and other foods fit for immediate consumption.

### Description

Continue to fill crucial social service gaps by providing emergency food for vulnerable populations, especially those experiencing homelessness, newly housed, undocumented populations, or others who may have difficulty accessing federal assistance. This includes the nearly half of food insecure people in Travis County that do not qualify for Federal Assistance such as SNAP, WIC, or School Meal Programs due to immigration status, housing status, or other factors<sup>9</sup>. Prioritize contracting in line with the values of the Good Food Purchasing Program criteria by working with locally-owned food service providers, who provide living wage jobs and opportunities for advancement, source from local and sustainable suppliers when possible, adhere to the Zero Waste mandate, and provide additional benefits like childcare support or allowances. Incorporate jobs training when possible (funding for training and working with nonprofits to help make this happen), see for example recommendation #5B: support living wage jobs and career development in the food sector. In conjunction with Recommendation #2B, conduct a stakeholder engagement process to identify which existing contracts to continue and which to develop in terms of adequate future disaster response. This also involves network building and establishing food supply and distribution contracts to be activated in event of emergency.

Potential programs:

- Contract with local commercial kitchens and food service businesses to provide grab-and-go meals to low-income communities via coolers installed at strategically located City and County facilities. Contracted vendors would provide living-wage jobs, source from local and sustainable suppliers when possible, and adhere to the Zero Waste mandate.
- Continue and adapt the Eating Apart Together (EAT) Hub, which provides food and meals to people experiencing homelessness, to late-pandemic and post-pandemic models

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<sup>9</sup> Gundersen, C., A. Dewey, E. Engelhard, M. Strayer & L. Lapinski. Map the Meal Gap 2020: A Report on County and Congressional District Food Insecurity and County Food Cost in the United States in 2018. Feeding America, 2020.

- Call for Ideas: a process to co-design with residents initiatives and projects that address food insecurity. This would be an opportunity for the City and its partners to continuously learn and implement innovative strategies that respond to residents' express needs and desires in shaping the food system that meets the needs of all residents. It also provides an opportunity for supporting community leaders and emerging projects.

#### Budget

- \$10 million over three years

#### Additional Staff Needed

- 2 additional FTE for program coordination, grant-funded for 3 years
- Support from Nourish Austin Social Service Funding Specialist for contract development and execution

#### Measuring Success

- Distribute at least 1 million meals annually
- A minimum of \$3M directed to local food businesses who provide living wage jobs (\$15+/hour) to all employees

#### Approximate Implementation Timeline

- Short-term, 1-2 years

#### Examples from other cities

- [Restaurant Revitalization Program](#)
- [Feed Phoenix](#)

#### Supporting Resolutions, Recommendations, and Memos

- Memo to Mayor and Council on January 26, 2021 - [Update on Food Access Needs and Emergency Feeding Response to COVID-19](#)

Recommendation 1B: Increase access to healthy, affordable nonperishables and groceries via innovative distribution models.

#### Description

Partner with local and national food distribution companies, nonprofits, and City departments to expand pilot programs developed using CARES Act funding in 2020. Design and implement innovative models to increase access to essential grocery delivery for those who otherwise could not access them. This initiative could help address the lost wages and reduced incomes experienced by many



residents caused by ongoing job losses related to the COVID19 pandemic and lost work days during Winter Storm Uri.

Potential programs:

- Continuation and expansion of free food box home delivery (in partnership with Central Texas Food Bank, Good Apple, APH Neighborhood Centers, etc.)
- Partnerships with local farms/farmers to subsidize food baskets and delivery to low-income households or neighborhoods
- Continuation of the WIC proxy shopping program which allows designated individuals to purchase items with WIC benefits on behalf of those who otherwise have difficulty using them

Budget

- \$6 million over three years. Potential to partner with local philanthropy and federal grant programs.

Additional Staff Needed

- Support from Nourish Austin Social Service Funding Specialist for contract development and execution

Measuring Success

- Serve a minimum of 1,000 families annually
- Provide over 2,000 deliveries representing approximately over 168,000 meals annually

Approximate Implementation Timeline

- Short-term: 1-2 years

Examples from other initiatives and cities

- Build on existing pilot WIC Proxy Shopper Program
- Build on existing pilot Amazon Fresh and Central Texas Food Bank partnership with APH Neighborhood Centers
- [Dallas](#)

Supporting Resolutions, Recommendations, and Memos

- Austin Travis County Food Policy Board Recommendation [20200612 4c.v.i. COVID19 Food System Response Recommendation](#)

## 2. Prepare for food access needs in advance of future disasters and disruptions.

### Recommendation 2A: Provide Food at Resiliency Hubs

#### Description

Incorporate healthy, culturally appropriate, nonperishable food storage and other basic food-related needs, along with potable water supply, in the City's new resiliency hub model. Work with locally-owned suppliers and food producers to purchase food and water suitable for long-term storage and create mechanisms for monitoring and replacing inventory as needed. Use lessons learned to inform the development of public food hubs (see Recommendation #4D, plan and build a network of regional food hubs) that can incorporate other mechanisms for improving food access, such as social services, commercial kitchens, food business incubation space, and perishable food aggregation.

#### Budget

- \$5 million over 3 years

#### Additional Staff Needed

- Support from Nourish Austin Social Service Funding Specialist for contract development and execution

#### Measuring Success

- Ability to provide 25,000 prepared meals and 25,000 food boxes per day during a disaster

#### Approximate Implementation Timeline

- Short-term, 1-2 years

#### Examples from other cities

- [Minneapolis' Climate and Health Resiliency Hubs Pilot](#)
- [Baltimore's Resiliency Hub Networks](#)

#### Supporting Resolutions, Recommendations, and Memos

- Winter Storm Uri After-Action report (forthcoming)
- City Council [Resolution 20210408-028 Resiliency Hubs](#)

Recommendation 2B: Ensure adequate disaster preparedness and planning and create disaster response contracts for food resources permanent.

#### Description

Revise the current Austin-Travis County Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) by creating a distinct Emergency Food Access Plan (as an appendix to the EOP) that ensures the City has ways of adequately responding to food access needs during a disaster. Incorporate the findings from the Winter Storm Uri After Action Report. Develop emergency food contracts with local businesses to supply food in the event of a disaster. Address challenges with identifying unmet needs across the community during a disaster and coordinate social service referrals between 211, 311, and ConnectATX. Explore creation of permanent community disaster liaisons (similar to community health workers or community ambassadors) and on-going case management in a disaster recovery. This is related to, and would inform, the regional food systems plan recommendation (#3A) but it is City of Austin focused and a shorter process. Funding needed to support staffing and community engagement and outreach processes.

#### Budget

- \$100,000 for community engagement process

#### Additional Staff Needed

- Support from Nourish Austin Social Service Funding Specialist for contract development and execution

#### Measuring Success

- Engage 25,000 community members and relevant for-profit and non-profit food supply chain stakeholders in the development of the plan
- Completed Emergency Food Access Plan appendix to the Emergency Operation Plan updated every 5 years

#### Approximate Implementation Timeline

- Short-term, 1-2 years

#### Examples from other cities

- [Baltimore's Food Resiliency Strategy](#)
- [Baltimore Food System Resilience Report](#) (Plan for Food Access During Incidents and Disasters)

#### Supporting Resolutions, Recommendations, and Memos

- Winter Storm Uri After-Action report (forthcoming)

### **3. Plan for a more equitable and resilient regional food system by co-creating a vision with residents**

Recommendation 3A: Develop an Austin-area Regional Food Systems Plan and implementation framework.

Description

A regional food systems planning process will identify policy changes and direct actions to take to achieve a more equitable, sustainable, and resilient food system. The process would involve broad, equity-focused community engagement to identify and map the community-based assets of diverse regional food system partners, and engage stakeholders beyond the City of Austin. The process will facilitate idea sharing, community relationships, and value-chain coordination activities to build trust and organizational capacity of the regional food system partners. A collective vision in the form of a regional food systems plan will provide the City and other regional stakeholders with a list of actions to support food systems development and move communities towards food sovereignty and food resiliency.

Those most negatively impacted by our current food system will lead and directly shape the plan by providing input and co-creating solutions with staff and other stakeholders. This could include a "food apartheid" analysis that investigates how past and current City policies have created the racial disparities present in food access and food sovereignty for Black and Brown communities in Austin. Implementation of these solutions will be measured, quantitatively and qualitatively, in ways that hold the City and its partners accountable to those most negatively affected by the current food system. Funding is needed for staff to coordinate the planning process, for consultants to assist with the data gathering and synthesis, and to pay for community members' involvement and expertise.

Budget

- \$2 million over 2 years. Potential to partner with local philanthropy and federal grant programs.

Additional Staff Needed

- 0.5 FTE for program management, grant-funded for 3 years (combined with staffing for #5E)
- Support from Nourish Austin Social Service Funding Specialist for contract development and execution

Measuring Success

- From across central Texas, engage at least 50,000 community members, two dozen Municipal and County elected officials, and relevant for-

profit and nonprofit food supply chain stakeholders in the development of the plan

- Annual Regional Food Systems Summit
- Completed Austin-area Regional Food Systems Plan

#### Approximate Implementation Timeline

- Medium-term, 3-5 years

#### Examples from other cities

- New York City's [Food Forward: 10 Year Food Policy Plan](#)
- San Diego County [Food Vision 2030](#)
- City of Columbus and Franklin County, OH [Local Food Action Plan](#)
- [Vermont Agriculture and Food System Strategic Plan](#)
- [Greater Pittsburgh Food Action Plan](#)

#### Supporting Resolutions, Recommendations, and Memos

- Austin Travis County Food Policy Board [Recommendation 20210405 - Funding for Food and Equity](#): “the City of Austin and Travis County support and fund the convening of community partners led by a Community Advisory Board, made up of community members impacted by food system inequities that will result in measurable equitable food-related outcomes through a Austin/Travis County Food System Plan (e.g Food Forward ATX) Central Texas regional food plan that includes sustainable operational structures, policies, programs and financing. These investments will result in a community-supported food system action plan with specific proposed recommendations, policies, and processes by public, private, and institutional entities that address the legacy of historical injustices related to food production, processing, distribution, access, and waste.”
- Austin Travis County Food Policy Board [Recommendation 20200612 - 4.c.v.i COVID19 Food System Response Recommendation](#)
- Austin Travis County Food Policy Board Recommendation 20200511 – 3.a.iv.i Funding for Food and Equity  
<http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=342811>

#### **4. Invest in the food system in ways that increase food access, community resilience, and equitable economic prosperity**

Recommendation 4A: Launch a regional Good Food Fund to drive public, private, and philanthropic investment in sustainable, equitable, and resilient food businesses and initiatives.

Description

The effects of historic, systemic, and institutional racism and discriminatory practices and policies, such as the City of Austin's 1928 Master Plan, have perpetuated public and private disinvestment in communities of color and low-income communities, reducing opportunities to high-paying jobs and business ownership. This is particularly true in the food sector; many historically Black and Brown neighborhoods in the City's Eastern Crescent continue to lack food businesses such as grocery stores, other healthy food retail, and culturally appropriate and affordable restaurants. Redlining and related government policies created the conditions for historically undervalued properties, preventing many Black and Brown individuals from realizing the true potential of their assets and from starting or growing businesses or other ventures. Systemic discrimination in the banking system has also impacted many residents' abilities to obtain financing for homes and businesses, and to purchase land and other assets. As increasing the costs of land and housing further displace Eastern Crescent communities and spur gentrification, new tools and mechanisms are necessary to improve access to patient capital and increase business ownership opportunities for those who have been and continue to be excluded from Austin's broader economic prosperity.

Investment in the food sector, led by the public sector and in partnership with impact investors and mission-driven foundations, can address government and market failures and assist Austin's underserved communities in achieving food sovereignty. A regional Good Food Fund would provide non-debt and debt capital, as well as targeted technical assistance, to individuals and entities developing concrete solutions to address food access and increase food-related economic activity in disinvested areas. Such projects could also improve local food supply chains, the significance of which has been illuminated by the COVID19 pandemic and Winter Storm Uri. Project applications would be co-designed and evaluated with leadership and engagement from those most negatively affected by the current food system, including residents of underinvested neighborhoods. Potential selection criteria could include projects' impacts on improving healthy food access, racial and social equity, environmental stewardship, local sourcing, and economic development (such as creating living wage jobs and business-to-business development).

Funding and technical assistance from the Good Food Fund could support the development of other recommendations in the Nourish Austin proposal,

including Recommendation #4B (supporting the development of non-profit and cooperatively-owned grocery stores,) #4E (increase local food production and affordability in underserved areas), and #5B (support living wage jobs and career development in the food sector), among others.

#### Budget

- \$10 million over 3 years. Potential to leverage financial support from regional governments, federal programs, and philanthropic foundations.

#### Additional Staff Needed

- 0.5 FTE to initiate, develop contracts and partnerships, grant-funded for 3 years
- Support from Nourish Austin Social Service Funding Specialist for contract development and execution

#### Measuring Success

- Assist at least 150 local food businesses and nonprofit organizations, including healthy food retailers
- Create and retain at least 300 jobs at existing or new food sector establishments
- Leverage community and philanthropic donations, private investment, and other funding mechanisms for at least half of the fund's projects

#### Approximate Implementation Timeline

- Short-term, 1-2 years

#### Examples from other cities and places

- [Michigan Good Food Fund](#)
- [California FreshWorks](#)
- [America's Healthy Food Financing Initiative](#)
- [Colorado Farm & Food Systems Respond & Rebuild Fund](#)
- [New Orleans Fresh Food Retailer Initiative](#)
- [El Paso County Healthy Food Financing Initiative](#)
- [Harris County Healthy Food Financing Initiative](#)
- [Dallas Development Fund's Healthy Food Initiative](#)

#### Supporting Resolutions, Recommendations, and Memos

- Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board [Recommendation 20200612-4 c.v.i. COVID-19 Food System Response Recommendation](#): "Develop a framework and fund (e.g., Michigan Good Food Fund) for better food purchasing that is linked to the existing and proposed Central Texas Food System Planning Process and Goals (i.e. fair practices for an

equitable food system) and includes direct financial assistance. Make central to the planning and implementation process working with regional food actors (communities, organizations, institutions, businesses) to research, evaluate and adapt evidence-based policies in order to understand, address & transform the historic racialized divestment of resources (including land) and displacement.”

- City Council [Resolution 20210304-067](#) formally apologizing for the enslavement of Black people and eradicating the effects of the City’s systemically racist practices.

**Recommendation 4B:** Support the development of non-profit and/or cooperatively owned grocery models in underserved areas.

#### Description

Non-profit and community-owned models for food retail and grocery stores increase the potential for individual and community wealth building in low-income communities by providing community control and potentially more affordable food options. Work to support cooperative grocery models would include prioritizing models that work with the Nutritious Food Incentive Program (see Recommendation #5A), discounts for customers paying with SNAP/EBT, and low-cost or sliding scale options for paying for co-op membership shares. According to analysis performed by the Office of Sustainability in 2018, more than twelve of Austin’s zip codes currently lack a full service grocery store. Utilizing a mission-driven business model to address this gap could provide a viable supplement to traditional grocery store recruitment. Funding for this initiative could support specialist consultants who can empower community members to develop their own food retail options, as well as land acquisition costs, construction and building materials, and startup costs to ensure the project gets up and running.

#### Budget

- \$20 million for feasibility planning and facility construction, and startup costs. Potential to partner with federal programs, investors, and philanthropic foundations.

#### Additional Staff Needed

- 0.5 FTE to manage project
- Support from Nourish Austin Social Service Funding Specialist for contract development and execution

#### Measuring Success



- Engage at least 20,000 residents in the Eastern crescent and all relevant relevant for-profit and nonprofit food supply chain stakeholders in the development
- Plan, design, build, and begin operations of at least 1 new community-owned and/or community-controlled grocery store in an area lacking healthy food retail
- Leverage community and philanthropic donations, private investment, and other funding mechanisms for at least half of the overall project costs

#### Approximate Implementation Timeline

- Long-term; 5-10 years

#### Examples from other cities

- Washington, D.C.: [Good Food Markets](#), funded in part by a grant from Washington D.C.'s Neighborhood Prosperity Fund
- Lacrosse, WI: [People's Food Co-op, funded in part by a Community Development Block Grant \(CDBG\) grant](#) from the City of Lacrosse.

#### Supporting Resolutions, Recommendations, and Memos

- City Council [Resolution 20160303-020](#): "...develop recommendations regarding improving access to food which shall include consideration of, but not be limited to full service grocery stores, wholesale produce markets, increasing fresh food choices at existing stores, impacts of incorporating educational components into efforts to expand food access, nonprofit and coop models for grocery stores, and expansion of community gardens."

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Recommendation 4C: Incentivize existing retailers to sell more healthy food items directly to customers.

#### Description

While many neighborhoods lack full service grocery stores, many are also home to dollar stores, convenience stores, gas stations, and fast food restaurants that often sell expensive, less nutritious food items. The City's healthy corner stores initiative, a partnership of the Economic Development Department and Austin Public Health, shows potential in working with convenience store owners to increase the sale of healthy and fresh food items. Similarly, the Office of Sustainability, in partnership with local food investors and nonprofits, launched the Neighborhood Pop-up Grocery (NPUG) program in 2020, which supported 29 restaurant owners in pivoting their business models to sell fresh produce from local farmers directly to consumers, primarily in the Eastern Crescent.

NPUG also resulted in the retention of 19 food service jobs that would otherwise have been lost due to reduced sales during the COVID19 pandemic, generating a 15% return on investment over what the City spent on the program. This model successfully allowed restaurants to stay open while increasing the quantity of city-supported fresh food outlets in underserved areas.

Funding for expanding the City's healthy corner stores program to include more stores and more types of stores, including dollar stores, as well as for continuing the Neighborhood Pop-Up Grocery program (NPUG) could allow for food retail transformations and the creation of small-scale fresh grocery stores across the City. Successful initiatives in other cities such as San Francisco show that the greatest impact on food and business outcomes comes from full retail space conversions, extensive community engagement, and robust nutritional education.

#### Budget

- \$2 million over 3 years to fund community engagement processes, store conversions and product subsidies, and nutrition education

#### Additional Staff Needed

- 0.5 FTE to manage the community engagement and design process and implementation
- Support from Nourish Austin Social Service Funding Specialist for contract development and execution

#### Measuring Success

- Support increased sales of fresh produce and other healthy food items in at least 15 food retail locations and/or restaurants across the City's Eastern Crescent (5 stores per year)
- 5 full-store or restaurant renovations (1-2 per year)
- At least 50 nutritional classes or outreach events at or in partnership with engaged stores over three years

#### Approximate Implementation Timeline

- Medium-term, 3-5 years

#### Examples from other cities

- San Francisco [Healthy Retail SF](#)

#### Supporting Resolutions, Recommendations, and Memos

- Austin Travis County Food Policy Board [Recommendation 20150608 5A1C Support for Strategies for Increasing Access to Healthy Food](#)
- City Council [Resolution 20160303-20](#)
- [Memo to Mayor and Council in response to Resolution 201603003-20](#)
- Memo to Mayor and Council - [Update on Food Access Needs and Emergency Feeding Response to COVID-19](#)

#### Recommendation 4D: Plan and build a network of regional food hubs

##### Description

By building on resilience hubs (Recommendation #2A) and the regional food systems planning process (Recommendation #3A), the City has an opportunity to transform the local food system via the development of publicly-owned and/or operated food hubs that provide physical food aggregation as well as community and economic development activities.

A regional food hub (or network of hubs) could be new facilities or conversions of existing spaces into food-system and resilience-focused centers. The food hub(s) could provide inventory for emergency food response. The inventory could be rotated out and provided as a supply of low-cost/ no-cost food for other food insecurity programs. The food hub(s) could also generate revenue (through space rental, classes, low-cost food retail like a nonprofit grocery store or community cafeterias, etc.) to subsidize its operational costs, via providing services such as food business incubation space, community space and classroom rental, food aggregation and storage facilities, low-cost food retail (like a community-owned grocery store), and more.

A food hub network would provide social and economic regional benefits including robust public control over local food supply (particularly important during disasters or other disruptions), local food business support and development (particularly in ability to offer affordable space and provide living wage food sector job training), and increased local food production viability (via aggregation and increased access to markets, including public institutions like the City and its partners).

##### Budget

- \$200,000 for a feasibility study and community engagement process, possibly to be combined with processes for other Nourish Austin recommendations
- \$29.8 million for build-out and management

##### Additional Staff Needed

- 1 FTE to manage and implement engagement process and resulting project
- Support from Nourish Austin Social Service Funding Specialist for contract development and execution

#### Measuring Success

- Engage at least 20,000 residents in the Eastern crescent and all relevant relevant for-profit and nonprofit food supply chain stakeholders in the development
- Plan, design, build, and begin operations of at least 1 regional food hub with at least 50,000 square feet of food storage and packing space
- Support at least 170 local and regional food businesses and provide rental space for at least 5 food-related community and social service organizations
- Distribute at least 10 million pounds of regionally-produced produce a year
- Support at least 50 new full-time jobs per year
- Leverage community and philanthropic donations, private investment, and other funding mechanisms for at least half of the overall project costs
- A feasibility study and detailed business plan for the food hub(s) that includes clear pathways for revenue generation and long-term operability

#### Approximate Implementation Timeline

- Long-term, with project implementation beginning in FY21 and full execution within 5-10 years

#### Examples from other cities

- [Northwest Food Hub Network](#)
- [New York State Regional Food Hub - Grow NYC](#)
- [Ecotrust's the Redd on Salmon St](#) in Portland, OR

#### Supporting Resolutions, Recommendations, and Memos

- [Feasibility Study for a Central Texas Food Hub](#) (Sustainable Food Center in partnership with regional food system stakeholders)
- City Council [Resolution 20210408-028 Resiliency Hubs](#)

Recommendation 4E: Increase local food production and affordability in underserved areas via an urban agriculture planning process

#### Description

Supporting local farmers and growers is key to long-term community resilience as they can improve healthy food access, strengthen local supply chains, and improve business and community wealth building opportunities, particularly for Austin's communities of color. Due to the effects of historic discrimination within the US Department of Agriculture, Black farmers across the country have lost 80 percent of their land from 1910 to 2007 and on average operate much smaller and less profitable farms compared to white farmers. Black farmers currently make up less than 3% of all Texas farmers, and recent data suggests that Austin is currently home to just one Black full-time farmer.

To address these ongoing inequities and increase local food production and affordability in areas currently lacking full service grocery stores or other healthy food retail, staff propose completing an urban agriculture planning process, to be led and co-designed by farmers and ranchers, with a focus on Black, Indigenous and farmers of color. The urban agriculture plan would develop a set of specific strategies and policy changes that could address lack of access to land, lack of technical support, lack of access to existing markets, and lack of access to capital, among other issues faced by farmers of color.

Potential strategies:

- Farmland Community Land Trust, with opportunities built in for farmers to eventually purchase or own the land they farm
- Farmer Incentive Program, which would provide support for starting or operating growing operations with community benefit, including potentially on city or county-owned properties
- Travis County AgriLife Extension programs focused on racial equity and sustainable agriculture

Budget

- \$200,000 for a robust community engagement process (could be incorporated into Recommendation 3A)
- \$4.8 million over three years to support implementing solutions

Additional Staff Needed

- 1 FTE to manage community engagement process and implement solutions
- Support from Nourish Austin Social Service Funding Specialist for contract development and execution

Measuring Success

- Engage relevant for-profit and nonprofit food production stakeholders in the development of the plan

- Completed Austin-area Urban Farm Master Plan including identification of concrete strategies and potential funding sources

#### Approximate Implementation Timeline

- Mid-term; 3-5 years

#### Examples from other cities and places

- [Baltimore's Urban Agriculture Plan](#)
- Atlanta's [Grow-A-Lot](#)
- [Opal's Farm](#) in Dallas
- [Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust](#)
- [Grow NYC's Farmer Assistance Program](#)

#### Supporting Resolutions, Recommendations, and Memos

- City Council [Resolution 20210304-067](#)
- City Council [Resolution 20210325-066](#)
- Austin Travis County Food Policy Board Recommendation Recommendation 20190513-5iv2a [Consideration of Agricultural Production on County/City Land](#)

## **5. Strengthen the power of individuals and households to purchase healthy food**

Recommendation 5A: Expand enrollment in and use of food assistance benefits (SNAP/WIC) at food retail outlets.

#### Description

Strengthen support for those who qualify for federal and state nutrition assistance programs (such as SNAP and WIC) and increase the value of those benefits. This includes increasing outreach and social services support to assist individuals with signing up for and understanding their benefits. More than 25% of Austin residents are low income, living below 185% of the Federal Poverty Level, and therefore face affordability barriers to accessing healthy food. Additionally, more than 42% of people whose income makes them eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Food Assistance Program (SNAP) in Travis County have not enrolled.

This recommendation also includes expanding the Nutritious Food Incentive Program, building on successes at local farmers markets (Double Up Bucks program in partnership with the Sustainable Food Center) to expand to local grocery stores in the Eastern Crescent. Staff recommend putting additional funding towards these programs so they can be expanded to additional food

retailers in areas of the city where households face heightened barriers to food access.

#### Budget

- \$7.5 million for 3 years. Potential to partner with federal programs and local philanthropic foundations.

#### Additional Staff Needed

- 0.5 FTE for managing process and contracts
- Support from Nourish Austin Social Service Funding Specialist for contract development and execution

#### Measuring Success

- Implement SNAP/EBT incentive program in partnership with at least 4 food retailers for 3 years
- Assist at least 30,000 individuals in completing applications for SNAP/WIC/EBT benefits (approximately 10,000 individuals per year)

#### Approximate Implementation Timeline

- Mid-term; 3-5 years

#### Examples from other cities

- [Seattle](#)

#### Supporting Resolutions, Recommendations, and Memos

- Austin Travis County Food Policy Board [Recommendation 20150608 5A1C Support for strategies for increasing access to healthy food](#)
- [Memo to Mayor and Council in response to Resolution 201603003-20](#)

Recommendation 5B: Support living wage jobs with benefits & career development in the food sector

#### Description

Work with local nonprofits and commercial kitchens to expand and develop programs that provide paid food-sector specific training (food handling certification, etc.) to low-income people and individuals experiencing homelessness. The training programs would also provide childcare and food to the trainees, and the food they create would be made available to individuals and families experiencing food insecurity. These programs could involve similar partners as Recommendations #1A (providing ready-to-eat foods to those experiencing food insecurity) and #4B (regional food hubs could be the location

for these programs). Programs developed under this recommendation must commit to paying at least the City of Austin's current living wage of \$15 an hour which is significantly higher than the local average for this sector. In partnership with organizations like Workforce Solutions, Good Work Austin, the Cook's Nook, and the Central Texas Food Bank, programs could also be developed that incentivize local restaurants and food service businesses to hire from these training programs by creating pathways to living-wage jobs with benefits such as paid sick leave. By creating new employment opportunities, this recommendation further supports economic stability for those experiencing homelessness, as prioritized by City Council. Such programs could also offer business training and support services to enable workers to start and operate their own food enterprises.

#### Budget

- \$6 million over three years (\$2 million/year)

#### Additional Staff Needed

- 1 FTE to develop program and coordinate contracts
- Support from Nourish Austin Social Service Funding Specialist for contract development and execution

#### Measuring Success

- Train and employ at least 300 individuals over 3 years
- All trainees are paid \$15/hr or higher

#### Approximate Implementation Timeline

- Short-term; 1-3 years

#### Examples from other cities

- [Cincinnati COOKS!](#)

#### Supporting Resolutions, Recommendations, and Memos

- Austin Travis County Food Policy Board [Recommendation 20200612-4.c.v.i COVID-19 Food System Response Recommendation](#): "Support essential food system workers (e.g., grocery clerks and stockers, fast food workers, food hub workers, school meal preparers) through access to resources and benefits including 1. Paid sick leave 2. Free child care. 3. (Temporary) Health insurance and/or stipends to cover medical expenses related to emergency health/pandemic costs. 4. Support essential worker access to readily available mental health care during emergency response circumstances. Require large food businesses provide sick pay, hazard pay, family leave, and respect the right to



organize. Support essential worker access to readily available mental health care during emergency response circumstances.”