



# FOOD SECURITY IN VERMONT: ROADMAP TO 2035

*farm*  *to* *plate*



Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund

## About the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund

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Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund (VSJF) was designated by the Vermont Legislature in 2009 to serve as the administrator of the Farm to Plate Investment Program, with the aim of strengthening Vermont's food system toward the following outcomes:

1. Increase sustainable economic development and create jobs in Vermont's food and farm sector
2. Improve soils, water, and resiliency of the working landscape in the face of climate change
3. Improve access to healthy local foods for all Vermonters



## The Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund administers the Farm to Plate Network

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The Farm to Plate Network is a collective impact network of over 350 Vermont farms, businesses, institutions, nonprofit organizations, funders, and government personnel. Our network approach enables action across multiple sectors to achieve the legislative outcomes above and make systemic change that no organization can accomplish alone. Over 125 Network member and cross-sector partner organizations participated in development of the Vermont Food Security: Roadmap to 2035.

## Acknowledgments

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The Vermont Food Security: Roadmap to 2035 is based on the ideas, experience, and effort of over 600 people in Vermont who took the time to share their opinions, expertise, and personal knowledge of food insecurity and to interview people, research, write, organize, advise, and assist in many ways with this complex project. Thank you all. Many of you are anonymous. We acknowledge all the authors of this Roadmap, named and unnamed. For a full list of contributing organizations and individuals, including general information about anonymous sources, see the online appendices.

Funding to develop this Roadmap was generously provided by the Vermont Department of Health, the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets, the Vermont Community Foundation, the Health Resources Services Administration (through Bi-State Primary Care Association), the Angell Foundation, and other anonymous foundations.

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## **Land Acknowledgment**

**The lands of present-day Vermont have served as a site of meeting and exchange among Indigenous peoples for thousands of years and are the home of the Western Abenaki people. The Farm to Plate Network honors, recognizes, and respects these peoples, especially the Abenaki, as the traditional stewards of the lands and waters. In that spirit, we acknowledge that we are guests in this land. We need to respect and help protect the lands within our use. Those who will implement this Roadmap have a responsibility to help make this truth visible, to support efforts toward indigenous sovereignty and well-being, and to dismantle the legacies of colonialism here in Vermont.**



## Introduction

**Our Shared Goal:** In 2035, all Vermonters will be food secure. The Vermont Food Security Roadmap to 2035 guides our way to that future. As defined by the United Nations, food security is “when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.” Vermont has the tools, knowledge, and resources to create food security and ensure that every person living here has the food they want and need to be healthy and nourished. Our time to act is now.

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Equitable food security for Vermonters is entwined with strengthening Vermont agriculture so that we have a secure, reliable, and resilient food supply in times of emergency. The Roadmap highlights Vermont’s agricultural economy as an extraordinary asset which positions us to take advantage of local and regional food production as a means of mitigating food insecurity today and during disruptions related to climate change tomorrow. Successful routes to food security also depend on related efforts beyond the scope of this document, such as increasing affordable housing statewide, reducing the cost of childcare, providing livable wage jobs, and others.

To achieve the goal of a food secure Vermont by 2035 the Roadmap prioritizes systems and policy changes over individual-level interventions. It builds on government programs, community innovation, and the shared experiences of Vermonters in recent years, with policy recommendations and actions we can take in Vermont to create permanent, equitable food security for all.

The Roadmap is a collective effort of the Farm to Plate Network, researchers, partner organizations, and Vermonters who contributed their personal expertise regarding food security. Development of the Roadmap took place over 24 months and involved over 600 people. In recognition of the many voices and perspectives involved, the first person “we” is used

throughout. The term “Vermonters” refers to every person who makes their home in Vermont, regardless of duration of residence or citizenship status. Quotes throughout are excerpts from statewide feedback across Vermont during the development of the Roadmap to 2035, and were edited only when essential for clarity.

The intentional and thorough process we used in developing this Roadmap should give state legislators and the administration, as well as all other Vermonters, confidence in the efficacy of the recommended actions prescribed in this document. We stand committed to seeing this Roadmap through to 2035 and are immediately beginning to tackle high-priority activities. By working together, we will soon reach the day when our food system is stable and resilient, and everyone can get the food they need and want with ease.

## Food Security Roadmap Background

In February 2021, the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund, the Vermont Farm to Plate Network, and the Vermont Agency of Agriculture released the [2021–2030 Agriculture & Food System Strategic Plan](#) (see page 5) to accomplish the three legislative outcomes articulated in the Farm to Plate Investment Program’s statute, namely to increase sustainable economic development and create jobs in Vermont’s food and farm sector; improve soils, water, and resiliency of the working landscape in the face of climate change; and improve access to healthy local foods for all Vermonters.

“As a society, making decision[s] about how to provide and care for each other is a sign of a healthy democracy.”

“It is also essential to engage and empower communities experiencing food insecurity to develop and implement solutions.”

“Climate change is going to be a big factor. We have no idea how the environment will change in Vermont. I think investing in our local food system is critical.”

The Food Security Roadmap project was initiated to provide additional details on how to achieve the third outcome—improve access to healthy local foods for all Vermonters—by completing Priority Strategy #24 in the Strategic Plan:

**Develop a Vermont food security [roadmap], centered around a thriving food system and inspired by community-based responses to food insecurity and disruptive events. Involve food insecure individuals as well as farmers in the planning, and investigate questions including, but not limited to, affordable housing,**

**health care, transportation, siting of retail grocery stores, food distribution, and ensuring the continued production of food in Vermont. Work to adopt state and regional level policies, procedures, and plans to ensure that the Vermont food supply is sufficient to withstand global or national food supply chain disruptions caused by climate change and other disasters.**

A team of dedicated leaders in the Farm to Plate Network was assembled to design and implement a robust public engagement process with a diverse group of Vermonters on how best to achieve food security for all who call Vermont home.

# The Roadmap Adds Details to the Strategic Plan



## Farm to Plate Investment Program sets forth three Legislative Outcomes

1. Increase sustainable economic development and create jobs in Vermont's food and farm sector
2. Improve soils, water, and resiliency of the working landscape in the face of climate change
3. Improve access to healthy local foods for all Vermonters



Vermont Agriculture & Food System Strategic Plan 2021-2030

**24. Develop a Vermont food security plan, centered around a thriving food system and inspired by community-based responses to food insecurity and disruptive events. Involve food insecure individuals as well as farmers in the planning, and investigate questions including, but not limited to, affordable housing, health care, transportation, siting of retail grocery stores, food distribution, and ensuring the continued production of food in Vermont. Work to adopt state and regional level policies, procedures, and plans to ensure that the Vermont food supply is sufficient to withstand global or national food supply chain disruptions caused by climate change and other disasters.**

6 8 10 11 13 14 15

**Priority Strategy #24**  
p. 32



Food Security in Vermont: Roadmap to 2035

## Details on Path to Improve Access to Healthy Local Foods for all Vermonters

- Government ensures food security for all in Vermont
- Vermont farms have the resources to be resilient
- Communities have the tools to support food security



## About Food Security

Creating food security for people in Vermont requires consideration of all aspects of daily life that influence our ability to eat nutritious, desirable food. The United Nations definition (see inset box) is a helpful framework to understand how food security is based on consistent physical, social, and economic access to food.

**Physical access** refers to variables in the physical environment, or related to a person's physical body, that impact food security. Examples include reliable transportation, distance from adequate grocery stores, whether a person has a kitchen or cooking tools, and personal physical capabilities.

**Social access** refers to the ways in which stigma, bureaucracy, racism, homophobia, and other harmful social dynamics create barriers to accessing food. Examples include language access and citizenship status, lack of access to foods that meet dietary and cultural needs, and fear for personal safety.

"Food/nutrition security is a fundamental need.[...] People who are food insecure are limited in their ability to meet or even pursue other needs. If everyone had food security in Vermont, there would be a significant increase in opportunity for thousands of people in our state, especially among marginalized communities that are most heavily impacted by food/nutrition insecurity."

**Economic access** refers to financial barriers, such as rising costs of living (including housing and utilities), health care debt, or insufficient wages and benefits, which make it challenging to afford food.

If people lack or lose any or all types of food access, they are or may become food insecure. Lack of access may be ongoing, or result suddenly, as from a personal

crisis like a job loss or a statewide emergency such as the 2023 floods.

Food insecurity is therefore the result of the interactions between economic, physical, and social systems.



## Food Security vs. Food Insecurity

**Food Security:** “Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.” We use the United Nations definition as our positive framework for understanding what a food secure Vermont will be like.

**Food Insecurity:** The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) indicates, “Food insecurity is the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.” Household food insecurity is a measurement of insufficient food for people within a household. USDA household insecurity survey questions relate to lack of money to buy food, e.g., “In the last 12 months, did you ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn’t enough money for food?” In this way, the USDA household food insecurity rate is a measure of economic access and does not encompass the social and physical factors leading to food security.

The interactions of our economic, physical, and social systems today are influenced by the past. As noted in the [Racial Equity in the Vermont Food System](#) brief, racial inequities in Vermont’s food system, including the disproportionate rates of food insecurity experienced by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, are rooted in the history of our nation and state. The U.S. and Vermont food system was built on land stolen from Indigenous peoples, and further developed with the forced labor of enslaved Black people and exploitation of immigrants from Asia and Latin America. We see myriad results of this history in Vermont today. Abenaki populations have little access to unceded ancestral lands, Black people in Vermont still experience marginalization in access to farmland, capital, services, and food, and many Latinx farmworkers in Vermont’s dairy industry and agricultural economy work under unsafe conditions, with low wages, and limited access to basic human needs like safe housing.

Food security in Vermont and the United States today reflects the impacts of past and present structural racism, discrimination, and many other factors that influence physical, social, and economic access. People are more likely to be food insecure based on where they live, their physical body, their economic situation, their race, or their sexual or gender identity. The Roadmap prioritizes the unique and wide-ranging needs of population groups who are disproportionately more likely to be food insecure. When it is necessary to briefly refer to people in these groups, we use the term “priority populations.” These priority populations are not mutually exclusive, as Vermonters may fall into more than one “at-risk” group. People who identify as Black, Indigenous, People of Color, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and more; and people who are living rurally, in poverty, or with a disability, are priority populations in Vermont, as shown in selected data on pages 10–11.

It is unacceptable for any person to be food insecure. Additionally, it is inequitable when food insecurity is more likely for some people than it is for others. Equitably addressing food security in Vermont must take a multifaceted approach that recognizes the unique challenges faced by different communities and populations.

### Current Programs Are Not Enough

Myriad federal benefit or “supplemental nutrition” programs are currently implemented in the state of Vermont through public and private entities (e.g., the USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, SNAP).

Many of these programs were designed to supplement the nutritional needs of people in a variety of specific demographic groups including children, older adults, people who have low incomes, and those who are disabled. These programs, while extremely valuable to people across the state of Vermont, do not currently meet people’s basic needs. Even at their maximum, benefits may cover only a portion of the need they are prescribed to address. For example, the Urban Institute’s data for Vermont shows that, averaged across Vermont’s fourteen counties, the average cost per meal exceeds the SNAP benefit per meal by 25%.

Recipients also often face a “benefits cliff”—where improvements in circumstances result in the loss of eligibility for essential assistance such that, even after obtaining a higher-paying job, total income still falls below daily needs. The nature of these programs also means they often require lengthy and intrusive

bureaucratic processes just to apply, and most people cannot easily understand if they are or are not eligible. Other types of widely available services (e.g., food shelves) were originally created as a temporary

charitable food response—as when a house fire, flooding or other emergency meant a household needed the support of their community and neighbors for a short period of time, until they were able to rebuild or get back on their feet. The charitable response has now become a complex system providing a regular source of food for tens of thousands of people, as they try to meet their daily needs within an economic system that does not allow people to make a viable living.

Throughout the Roadmap we use the word “supplemental” for all food and income supports, whether governmental or provided by nongovernmental, charitable, or other entities. The terms “benefits” or “benefit programs” refer to government programs such as WIC or SNAP/3SquaresVT.

**Food Security Is Climate Resilience**

Climate change will continue to impact food supply chains and jeopardize access to food across the globe. As stated in the [Farm to Plate Climate Change brief](#),

“Can you somehow make well-to-do people understand the necessity for charity for those who have less because of environmental, economic, etc. conditions, not because they’re ‘lazy’?”

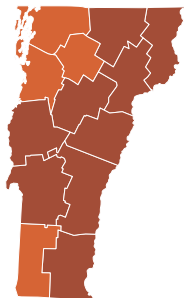
“Vermont will face considerable disruption to the local food system and farm profitability and viability because of climate change. In addition, the significant impact of climate change on global food production and

supply chains intensifies the need to increase the resilience of Vermont farming and local food systems and maintain our agricultural land base.” Addressing climate change requires major systems change in both our economy and our food system. We can prepare Vermont’s food system for disruption through building a strong regional food supply, bolstering the resilience of Vermont food producers, and thoughtfully planning to incorporate new residents migrating from other regions. Strong local food systems create climate resilience for all.

Furthermore, concerns in planning for climate-resilient communities align with food security concerns. These include but are not limited to: town and municipal planning, transportation concerns, the ecosystem services provided by working landscapes, equity and justice, and the need to grow multi-sector collaboratives. There are finite resources on our planet and the impacts of climate change disproportionately affect historically marginalized groups.

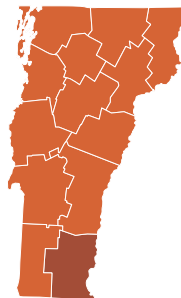
**Projected Climate Risks**

**Extreme Rain**



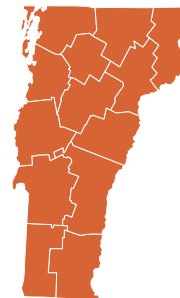
Annual precipitation and extreme precipitation events in Vermont have been above average in recent years.

**Hurricane**



Hurricanes Irene (2011), Floyd (1999), and Gloria (1985) were all billion-dollar disasters that impacted Vermont.

**Water Stress**



Vermont has experienced more abnormally dry days during the past 10 years than it did in the early 2000s.



Source: Stuart A Thompson and Yarnya Serkez, September 18, 2020, “Every Place Has Its Own Climate Risk. What Is It Where You Live?”, *The New York Times*. Based on data from Four Twenty Seven.

"For Latin migrant workers, there is a monopoly of how they access the ingredients of their traditional foods. There are well-known people [among] Latin migrant farmworkers; they offer translation services, transport, and they also sell food, sometimes [at] three times the market prices, taking advantage of their power position."



"It was the [name redacted] food shelf. They're not used to dealing with people who live in vehicles or are completely unhoused. So I couldn't take anything that was refrigerated, obviously. And they were like, 'We have all this canned food' and I was like 'I don't have a [\$&#%!] can opener, do you?' And they're like, 'No, we don't.'"

"I have tried to get food stamps 4 times without success, despite being food insecure and unemployed at times, because of how much of a hassle it is to get through the entire process."



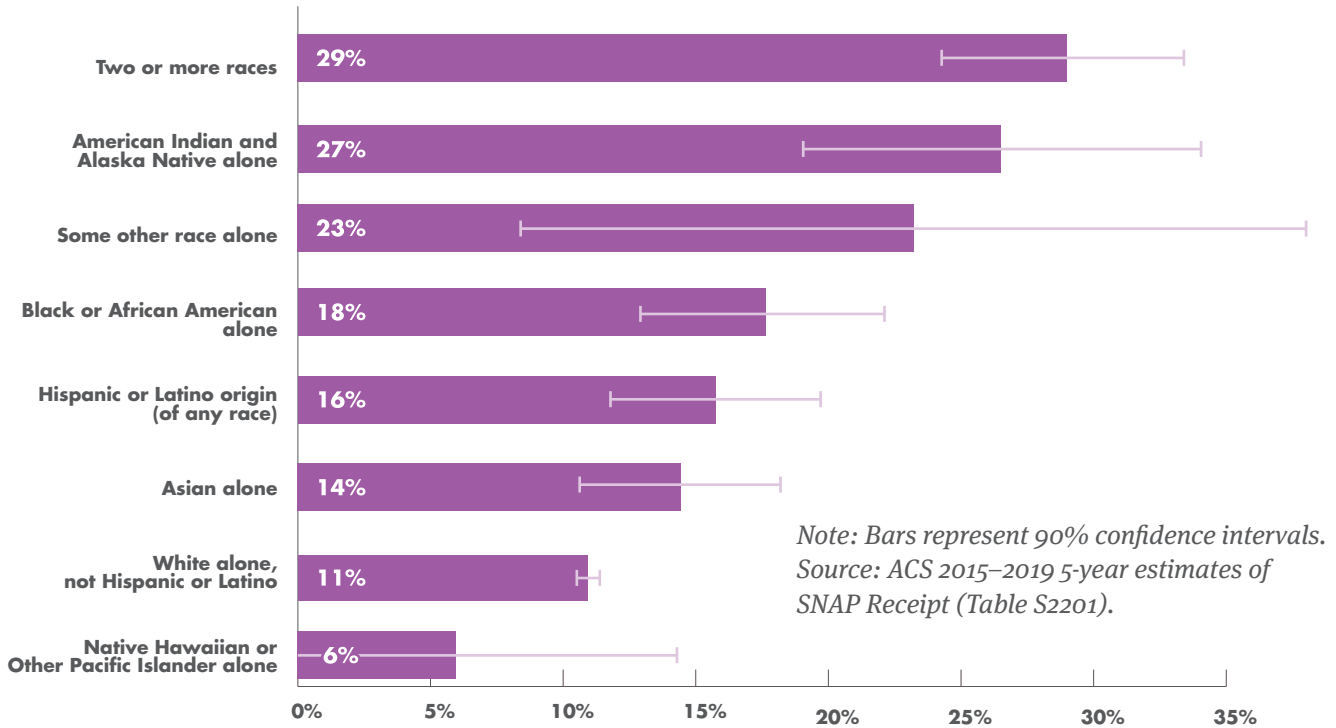
"Of course climate change. This year with the drought—I've never had an issue, I have wet land—but this year the drought really had an impact. My yields suffered for sure. I don't have the funds to pay for irrigation."

# Priority Populations in Vermont

A priority action in the Roadmap is to develop and maintain consistent data methods for identifying how many people in Vermont are food insecure (page 21). That said, current research clearly shows that Vermonters who live rurally, live with a disability, with incomes below the poverty line, are Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), and/or Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ+) are more likely to be food insecure. Selected illustrative data is presented below. “SNAP” refers to the USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, which in Vermont is called 3SquaresVT.

## Percentage of Vermont Households Receiving SNAP by Race/Ethnicity of Householder

Vermonters who identify as a race or ethnicity other than white receive SNAP at higher rates than those who identify only as white.

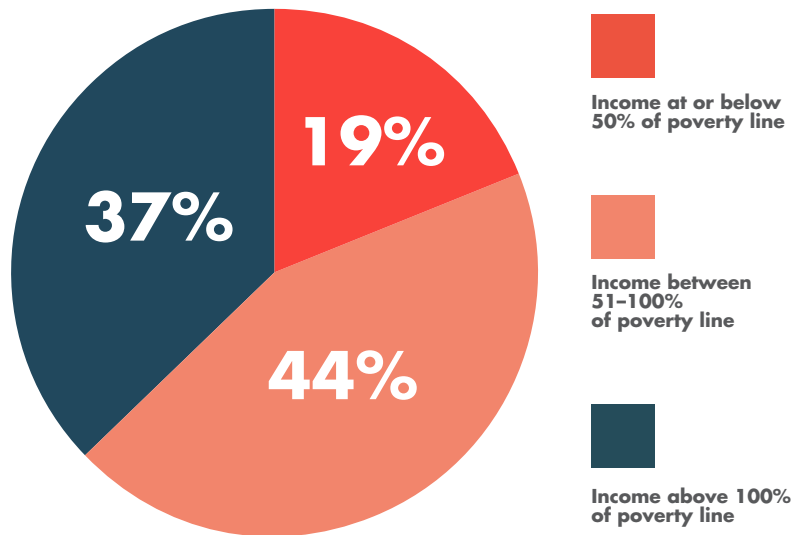


## Share of Vermont SNAP Participants by Household Income

63% of SNAP participants in Vermont are at or below the Federal Poverty Level, which in 2020 ranged from \$13,171 for an individual up to \$44,755 for a household of 8 people.

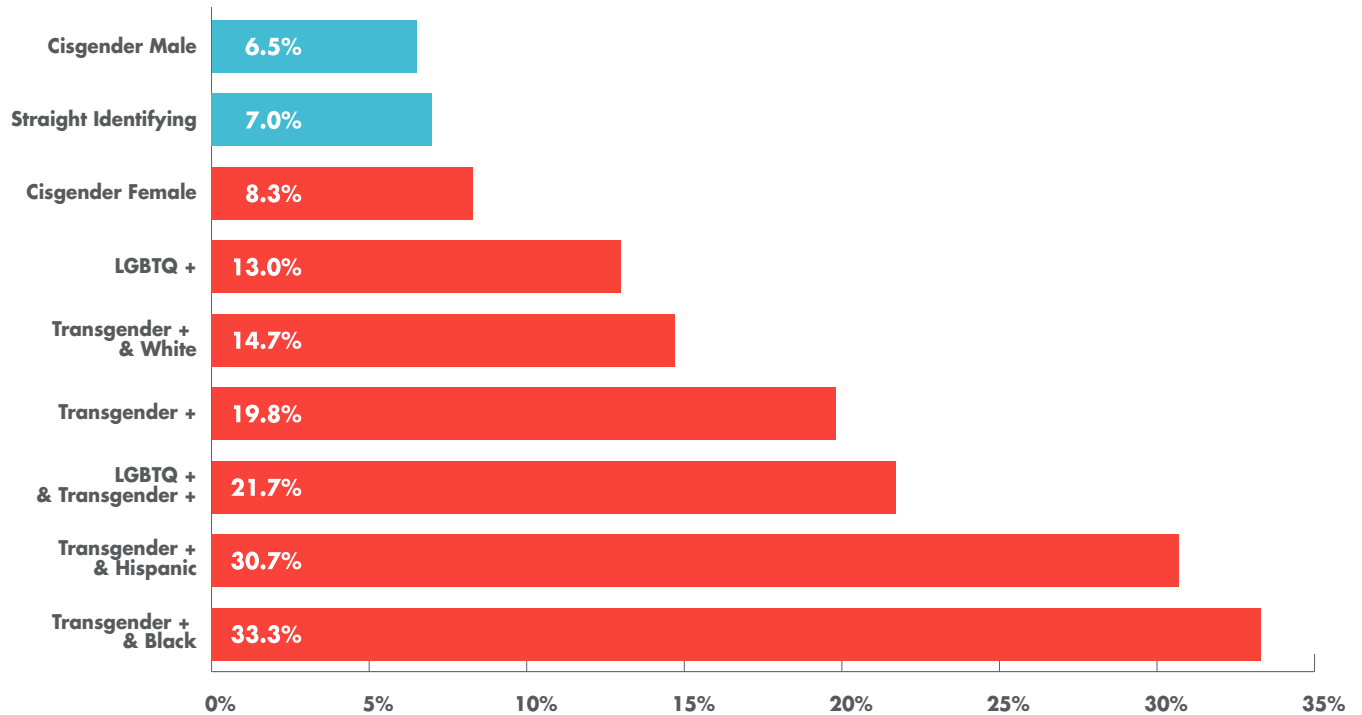
Households with income at or near the Federal Poverty Level do not have income sufficient to their needs. The 2022 Vermont Basic Needs Budgets and Livable Wage Report states, “The Basic Needs Budget for the rural single parent family[...]is about \$62,302[...].The Budget is well above[...]the Federal Poverty Level.”

Source: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities analysis of data from USDA Food and Nutrition Service, fiscal year 2020 (pre-pandemic period).



## LGBTQ+ Food Insecurity in New England

The chart below illustrates research on food security among New England residents who are LGBTQ+. It shows that LGB+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and other non-heterosexual) New Englanders experience food insufficiency at nearly twice the rate of heterosexuals. Transgender+ (transgender, genderqueer, gender nonbinary, and other non-cisgender) New Englanders experience food insufficiency at two to three times the rate of cisgender individuals. Additionally, the research found that LGBTQ+ New Englanders of color experience disproportionately higher rates of food insufficiency, with one in three Black transgender+ New Englanders experiencing food insufficiency. Bars in red indicate food insecurity rates above the state average of 8%.



Source: Leslie, Isaac Sohn et al. "LGBTQ+ food insufficiency in New England." *Agriculture and Human Values*, 1-16. 9 Dec. 2022, doi:10.1007/s10460-022-10403-5.

## Percentage of Vermont Households Receiving SNAP by Disability Status

Households including an individual with a disability received SNAP at more than three times the rate of households with no individuals with a disability (see chart below). Fifty-five percent (55%) of households that received SNAP included one or more individuals with a disability (data not shown).



Note: Bars represent 90% confidence intervals.

Source: ACS 2015–2019 5-year estimates of SNAP Receipt (Table S2201).



## Making the Food Security Roadmap

To determine the steps to create food security in Vermont, we gathered the experience and knowledge of Vermont residents. Participants included farmers, health care workers, state government personnel, transportation providers, and professionals from many additional sectors intertwined with food security. Most importantly, people who have experience tackling food security for themselves, their neighbors, and their families contributed their knowledge and suggestions.

A statewide community engagement process took place in 2022. Initial interviews took place with 54 professionals focused on food security and people impacted by transportation barriers to food access (48 participants). Further statewide outreach resulted in 64 one-on-one interviews, 286 survey responses, and 130 focus group participants. (See online appendices for details on methods and full reports on the feedback itself.)

Vermonters in every county of the state participated in the community engagement. Their answers contained

“I’m down to eating one meal a day so I don’t need to choose between paying a huge energy bill or [being] able to eat a meal. The food given through commodities is mostly riddled with salt or out-of-date meat,[...]wilted produce or mold spotted fruit.”

common concerns and priorities. They also suggested specific strategies, solutions, policy ideas, and adjustments to our existing food system and food security response. In order to determine which suggestions would then be included in the Roadmap, each was filtered through the question: *Will this suggested solution lead to a day*

*when everyone in Vermont has physical, social and economic access at all times to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life?* Lastly, a group of Farm to Plate members representing different sectors

reviewed all information to date, creating the goals, objectives, and strategies laid out in this Roadmap.

Shared themes emerged from the feedback data. Respondents indicated the need to address barriers related to bureaucracy, affordability, and stigma while expanding services and support in the areas of education, health, and transportation. Our respondents prioritized local food and equitable access to resources. The statewide feedback, influenced by our shared experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and recent floods, clearly called for a collaborative, multifaceted response to shared needs. Therefore, the Roadmap's strategies take the approach that we, as a society, can and should collectively support one another.

The statewide feedback indicated five conditions which will need to be present to achieve food security by 2035 for those living in Vermont:

1. Roadmap implementation must be well coordinated, highly collaborative, and focused on ensuring equity at every step in the process.
2. A demonstrated commitment to ensuring food security for all must exist among our elected officials and state government personnel.
3. All employers (business, government, nonprofit organizations) must take a role in ensuring food security for their employees (e.g., by providing livable wage and benefits).
4. Communities must have the tools they need to support food security.
5. Vermont farmers and food producers must have the resources necessary to provide a resilient food supply.

The goals, objectives, and strategies that make up the Roadmap and are presented on the following pages are drawn directly from the statewide community engagement process and create a pathway to the conditions above.

Whether you are a member of the legislature or a government official, service provider, farmer or community member, you will find a role in the effort to achieve food security in Vermont. What we need now is the commitment and political will to turn our aspirations into reality. Our collective action is necessary, now more than ever, to ensure food security across Vermont, in times of crisis and calm. We look forward to our work together.

## Message to the Federal Delegation

**This Roadmap focuses on actions our State and local governments and community institutions have the power to take. Federal programs are essential components of Vermont's Food Security Roadmap. In order for Vermont to avoid the disastrous effects of climate change and inequities in our food system, there must also be changes to the federal statutes that regulate federal agriculture and nutrition programs, immigration, and crop insurance, to name a few. We commit to working with Vermont's congressional delegation on changes to federal programs that would speed up our progress and expand federal funding for food security.**

# Getting to 2035

The Roadmap to 2035 provides shared action strategies to create food security. The information here provides details on how to navigate the different sections in the Roadmap. Each section focuses on a different goal area essential to achieving food security in Vermont.

The Roadmap is organized under three goals:

**Goal G:** Government ensures food security for all in Vermont

**Goal A:** Vermont farms have the resources to be resilient


**Goal C:** Communities have the tools to support food security

Each goal area then contains objectives, first summarized on page 15. Pages 16–45 detail the reasoning for each objective and provide strategies to reach that objective. Each objective and its affiliated strategies spring from community feedback or already existed within the 2021–2030 Agriculture and Food System Strategic Plan and were affirmed by the feedback. The strategies represent a mix of approaches

to reach the overarching goal of a Vermont where all people have the food they want and need at all times. There are clear roles and responsibilities for state and local governments, organizations, businesses, and communities. Some of the outlined strategies are already underway; others will need to be initiated. On page 46, you will learn about how work on the Roadmap will be well coordinated, highly collaborative, and focused on equity.

Following the Roadmap together, we will take immediate, effective action to relieve household food insecurity now, and progress toward system changes that will ensure our collective food security in the future.

## Anatomy of an Objective

<p><b>Goal</b></p>	<p>GOVERNMENT ENSURES FOOD SECURITY FOR ALL IN VERMONT</p>		
<p><b>Objective</b></p>	<p><b>G5: Ensure consistent, dignified access to nourishing, adequate, culturally responsive food, today and in the future</b></p> 	<p><b>Strategies</b></p> <p><b>STRATEGY G5.1</b> Strengthen and expand the state's prepared meal infrastructure utilizing, to the extent possible, existing meal programs and entities (e.g., Meals on Wheels). Increase the capacity of schools, restaurants, grocery stores, and farms to provide prepared meals. Expand infrastructure and systems for delivery and access. <b>!</b></p> <p><b>STRATEGY G5.2</b> Sustainably fund Vermont's current supplemental food access programs and systems while comprehensive policy substitutes—including state, non-governmental, and community-based programs—are put in place. <b>!</b></p> <p><b>STRATEGY G5.3</b> Ensure children in Vermont have access to free, nutritionally and culturally appropriate meals in any/all communal places of care and education—including, but not limited to, child care, early childhood education, school, after school, and summer programs. <b>!</b></p> <p><b>STRATEGY G5.4</b> Opt to provide the SNAP Restaurant Meals Program in Vermont. While eligibility is limited, it would increase overall SNAP enrollment. Support the Vermont Department for Children and Families (DCF) and its Economic Services Division to implement. Provide necessary equipment and technical assistance to small business owners who want to accept SNAP.</p>	<p><b>Strategies</b></p>
<p><b>Keep in Mind</b></p>	<p>Food insecurity disproportionately impacts priority populations in Vermont because systemic challenges create insecurities and barriers to access. Some of these barriers result in people needing prepared meals, not just groceries.</p> <p>All people deserve a reliable and acceptable source of nourishing grocery food and prepared meals. The supplemental programs providing this food access, in turn, need consistent resources to continue to offer the food in a manner and variety that is responsive to cultural and dietary needs. By prioritizing reliable access to nourishing food, we will be able to directly address more people's immediate needs while working on longer term solutions to address the root causes of food insecurity and lack of access to nourishing food.</p> <p><b>Keep in Mind</b> As we succeed in creating food security through other strategies, barriers will diminish for people in Vermont. However, there will always be people who need certain food supports, for example, delivered prepared meals or medically tailored meals. Through improvement and full funding today, the supplemental food systems will be prepared when emergencies arise.</p>	<p><b>VOICES OF VERMONTERS</b></p> <p>"As amazing as programs like [NOFA-VT's food access programs] and sliding scale are, we could keep expanding them forever and nothing would really change until poverty and economic inequality are shifted. I have trouble envisioning what policy or government support could fundamentally change that. People aren't hungry only because of inadequate food access programs. The more we create programs, the more we build systems that rely on the current inequity we have. But at the same time, I think these programs are amazing. Everything just has to be happening at the same time—emergency services, and longer-term sustainable change."</p> <p>"I'm a single mom with several kids so the free food for kids at school is fantastic."</p> <p>"Continue providing the great food supplemental programs like 3Squares...and Everyone Eats. I especially love the option of getting a healthy meal from Everyone Eats since I'm low income and not eligible for 3Squares. Food delivery to elderly low income people would be fantastic!"</p> <p>"Keep funding! Meals on Wheels funding has been cut. We are not turning anyone away but the funding isn't there. Funding food for all Vermonters!"</p>	<p><b>Voices of Vermonters (quotes from statewide feedback)</b></p>

**!** A strategy marked with this symbol is a high-priority strategy



# Goals and Objectives



## Government ensures food security for all in Vermont

- G1:** The State guarantees Vermonters have the necessary financial resources to meet their basic needs
- G2:** Access 100% of federal funding available for Vermonters by completing the streamlined, accessible enrollment system
- G3:** Create an Office of Food & Nutrition Security and clarify legislative jurisdiction over food security
- G4:** Create a food security emergency response system in Vermont
- G5:** Ensure consistent, dignified access to nourishing, adequate, culturally responsive food, today and in the future
- G6:** Invest in Vermont's town and village infrastructure
- G7:** Make impactful investments in transportation in rural and urban Vermont
- G8:** Utilize the health care system to identify and alleviate food insecurity

## Vermont farms have the resources to be resilient

- A1:** Provide direct, easy-to-access financial support to farmers who provide essential services to Vermont
- A2:** Accelerate the permanent conservation of Vermont's agricultural lands as working farms
- A3:** Provide essential and urgently needed investments in agricultural supply-chain infrastructure
- A4:** Establish easier and equitable access to farmland and on-farm infrastructure

## Communities have the tools to support food security

- C1:** Integrate food access into town plans across Vermont
- C2:** Expand local collaboration for effective delivery of daily and emergency food security resources
- C3:** Improve local food access while working on full food security in Vermont

## G1: The State guarantees Vermonters have the necessary financial resources to meet their basic needs



People need enough income to meet all of their basic needs at the same time in order to be food secure. The current federal and state benefit programs have gaps and barriers that limit their ability to fully support Vermonters. This is within our power to fix.

The state government is the only entity able to provide universal and dignified income supports that dovetail with federal and state supplemental nutrition programs. Through a flexible approach to closing the income gaps, the State can reduce both the stigma associated with using government programs and the resistance to collective spending to provide public benefits. Creating financial wellbeing will do more than any other measure to guarantee food security, community health, and economic prosperity in Vermont.


### Keep in Mind

This objective and the strategies listed below will require clear, standardized, and adequate measurement of what it costs to live in Vermont and a complete picture of the financial resources needed to fully meet basic needs. These should be based on the Joint Fiscal Office's biennial Basic Needs Budgets and Livable Wage Report. The State and philanthropic community should continue to fund the food access system while policies and systems changes are being implemented. This objective relies on [Objective G2](#).

## Strategies

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### STRATEGY G1.1

Provide supplemental payments to existing benefits programs, so that the total benefits to enrolled Vermonters provide financial assistance adequate to meeting all their basic needs. Make eligibility for the supplemental payments automatic for any person enrolled in a federal or state benefit program. 

### STRATEGY G1.2

Eliminate the benefits cliffs in existing programs. Develop a new state system that instead tapers the supports in existing programs so that as people gradually improve their income, they are able to continue meeting their basic needs. Make eligibility for the “benefits cliff system” automatic for any person enrolled in a federal or state benefit program.

### STRATEGY G1.3

Develop a state cash assistance program for the “missing middle”—people who earn too much to qualify for federal assistance programs but lack the financial resources to meet their basic needs.

### STRATEGY G1.4

Encourage all employers (business, government and nonprofit organizations) to pay livable wages to their employees so that they can meet basic needs without supplemental programs.

### STRATEGY G1.5

Establish a State cash assistance program for immigrants who are not yet eligible for federal benefit programs. Proven models in other U.S. states can guide design and effective implementation. Ensure application materials are available in multiple languages and culturally responsive.

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## VOICES OF VERMONTERS

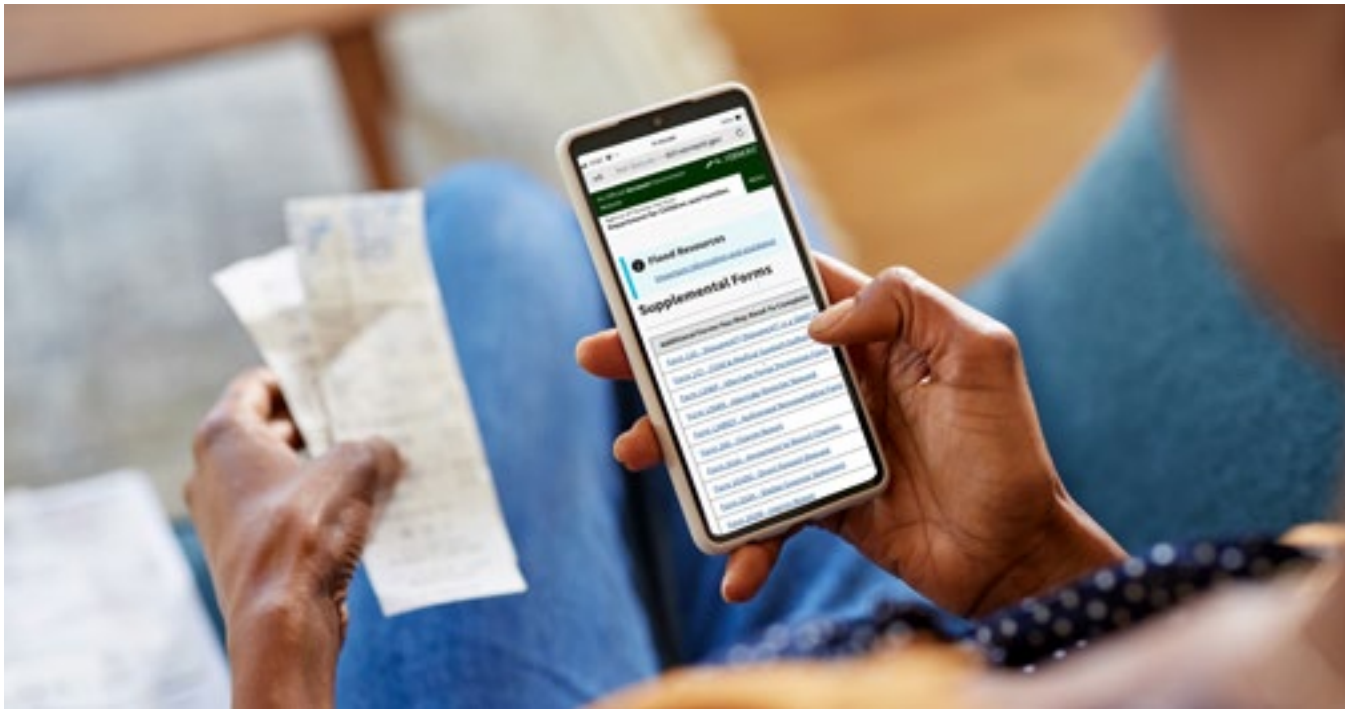
“We are your neighbors, we worked hard, we had illness or accidents, we are poor or poorer than we used to be, and we can't afford the food we need.”

“Looking out for false solutions that say we will solve food security by making sure there is a robust emergency feeding system, but not figuring out how to prevent people from needing emergency food in the first place.”

“WIC is an amazing program that supplements even middle-income brackets. Any way to expand it or similar programs to either include more people, or include more food would be amazing.”

“Anger and frustration come up. I worked full time in the community, in community services programs. I've helped a lot of people, and last year I got sick and went on disability. But since I didn't qualify for food stamps, I didn't qualify for other benefits, and it was very hard.”

## **G2: Access 100% of federal funding available for Vermonters by completing the streamlined, accessible enrollment system**



The current system available to apply for and enroll in food and economic assistance programs is flawed in a number of ways both for individuals navigating applications and for Vermont state employees operating the programs.

Required applications for food and economic assistance programs are difficult for anyone to navigate; limited English proficiency, certain disabilities, lack of access to broadband, and limited discretionary time due to work and family demands can compound this. When assistance programs are low-barrier, broadly accessible, and usable, it streamlines administrative time and cost. Program enrollment then increases, and thus the Vermont government, residents, and economy receive more of the federal funds set aside for these programs. Most essentially, everyone who qualifies for programs is able to participate with ease and dignity. Through the strategies below, we can maximize the reach and impact of these programs, creating a more just and resilient safety net.

### **Keep in Mind**

The State of Vermont is engaged in a multi-year effort to make enrollment systems better using a modernized integrated eligibility and enrollment (IE&E) system. The Roadmap relies upon the IE&E system being fully operational. The advantages of IE&E will need to be experienced and promoted for the public to gain confidence in the changes.

## Strategies

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### STRATEGY G2.1

Meet the established goal of completing the IE&E rollout by 2027, through allocating sufficient funding and staffing resources to maintain the intended timeline. Ensure flexibility in the IE&E system in order to create linked state support systems. ⚠️

### STRATEGY G2.2

Invest in the information technology changes required to allow all federal nutrition program options and flexibilities to be activated in case of emergency. Impactful examples include enabling the activation of Disaster-SNAP, including on a county-by-county basis; activating WIC online ordering; and establishing back-up WIC retailers in regions where only one WIC retailer is currently operating.

### STRATEGY G2.3

Fund Vermont 2-1-1 sufficiently to make it a fully functioning information referral system that connects people to the IE&E. It can also provide other comprehensive resources, information, and assistance to people and communities statewide, and collect data. The data is needed to make informed decisions, respond rapidly and effectively in times of disaster, and track progress toward the goals of this Roadmap. ⚠️

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## VOICES OF VERMONTERS

“Streamline food stamps, make it easier to apply—too much red tape. Also, have a state website where people could find resources [in] a one-stop-shop kind of program. Make it easy. The system is too difficult with Apps, QR codes[...]too many hoops to go through to apply.”

“More people should be able to sign up for EBT. What are the obstacles? Being on EBT has vastly improved my life, but I had to get past the shame of being on it. I have health issues, and good food is key.”

“When I knew that I needed help for food, I looked into 3SquaresVT, but it was pretty complicated even for me as a reader and speaker of English and have no disabilities, so I gave up on it. Getting all the documents together.”

“A comprehensive database or network of ALL resources for those who are food insecure.”

## G3: Create an Office of Food & Nutrition Security and clarify legislative jurisdiction over food security



The only entity in Vermont with the authority and capacity to implement changes at the scale required is our state government.

Vermonters deserve an undisputed champion for food security within their government, and a better system of accountability, responsibility, and authority to address food security in both the executive and legislative branches. Because food security involves structural issues that are the purview of multiple state agencies, a coordinated governmental approach, with increased inter-agency collaboration and decision-making alongside the joint tracking of food security indicators, is needed. For example, the Executive Director hired to lead the Office will oversee food security–related disaster planning and response, in collaboration with the Emergency Preparedness Director and Emergency Management Director, so that a coordinated plan exists and training exercises are regularly conducted.

Additionally, the government should make food security the defined responsibility of a committee or committees (establish jurisdiction and oversight), as it is not currently assigned to any.


### Keep in Mind

The Office of Racial Equity is a model. Creating an Office of Food & Nutrition Security will both require a statute change (i.e., a bill being enacted) and create an ongoing budget need for the position and activities of the Office. The Office staff can explore new funding opportunities across all Agencies, Departments, and Divisions, and ensure Vermont is maximizing its ability to draw down all possible federal funding.

## Strategies

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### STRATEGY G3.1

Create an Office of Food & Nutrition Security based out of the Agency of Administration with the authority to provide oversight and coordination across agencies and departments in state government and to collaborate with Statewide Food Security Coalition (see [page 46](#)) implementing aspects of the Roadmap on the ground. 

### STRATEGY G3.2

Clarify legislative committee jurisdiction related to the oversight of the food security of Vermonters. Update Vermont House and Senate rules to definitively assign oversight to one or more committees. 

### STRATEGY G3.3

Develop and maintain data systems for identifying how many people in Vermont are food insecure and track progress against this Roadmap. Potential data sources include food security screenings in health settings, and the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey (BRFSS) administered by the Vermont Department of Health.

### STRATEGY G3.4

Create a clear accountability matrix between agencies and departments with authority over various agriculture and hunger-related food security programs and efforts. 

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## VOICES OF VERMONTERS

“There is a perception in the [feedback] that Vermont’s government agencies don’t grasp the extent of food insecurity or aren’t on the side of the farmers/farming working to address it. We saw this as an opportunity to rethink how those agencies are structured. A potent approach would be to create a single agency to oversee all farm and food security work in the state. Specific suggestions we heard that such an agency could launch: pilot a universal local food allowance for all Vermont residents (close the SNAP gap); develop community food security grant opportunities that don’t have cost-matching requirements; proactively fund the types of farming that will feed Vermonters into an uncertain future and those putting fresh, healthy staples onto Vermonters’ plates; direct resources to communities experiencing the greatest inequities now. There was also a suggestion to sponsor one grant that communities themselves could vote to award. In general, a unified agency’s programs must better reflect the reality that food security affects far more Vermonters than the data show and ensure that every Vermont resident enjoys guaranteed access to the bounty of Vermont’s farms—including the many long-distance migrants who work on those farms and number high among our food insecure.”

Farm to Plate members reviewing statewide feedback

## G4: Create a food security emergency response system in Vermont

Objective G4



Two recent, very different emergencies—the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2023 floods—highlighted that existing Emergency Operations plans, though robust, need updating to meet today’s food security challenges.

Vermont has the opportunity to design an excellent food security emergency response system using recent lessons learned, which will lend a high level of detail to the strategies here. Systems and structures need to be in place and ready to be activated either in specific locations or statewide. These will only function effectively with State support, funding, and coordination. Mutual aid and the Vermont culture of neighborly assistance are important but can be hampered by the presence or absence of volunteers, financial support for emergency needs, personal relationships, and bias. In order for both government and mutual aid to be effective, Vermont 211 must be fully funded and operational (see G2). Each town needs to identify a lead person(s) who agrees to be contacted when needed, knows how to activate the local systems, and plugs into the statewide support network. Ensuring systems and structures are in place before the next emergency will mean more needs are met in that emergency. When needs are met consistently rather than intermittently or haphazardly, it reduces stigma.

### Keep in Mind

Collecting data during both emergency and non-emergency times needs to be part of the 211 system. Limited capacities in some Vermont towns will require creative solutions, including possible multi-town collaboration.



## Strategies

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### STRATEGY G4.1

Formally establish the existing Mass Feeding Group as a component in the State Emergency Management Plan (SEMP). Revise the existing SEMP to include food and nutrition and expand the Mass Care section related to food and nutrition, including a plan to activate the Mass Feeding Group and designating it to receive relevant 211 data.

### STRATEGY G4.2

Design and implement a statewide food security emergency response system in which each town participates. Integrate the system into State emergency operations plans, with the proposed Office of Food & Nutrition Security providing oversight. Revise the Vermont Emergency Management Local Emergency Management Plan (LEMP) templates to include planning for food security emergency response. ⚠

### STRATEGY G4.3

Allocate sufficient funds to a food security emergency response Reserve Fund, to be made immediately accessible during an emergency. Establish standing contracts with statewide nonprofit organizations able and willing to activate appropriate emergency food response programs. Identify, in advance, the authority and funding source for quickly purchasing and distributing appropriate types of food and water during an emergency. ⚠

### STRATEGY G4.4

Carefully integrate town response systems into the State Emergency Management Plan and include such considerations as: requiring towns to participate in the food security emergency planning and response system; providing standard systems and checklists for towns and compensation for lead town officials; and creating redundancy with personnel, records, and other preparations. ⚠

### STRATEGY G4.5

Include a Food Security Emergency Management track in the annual Vermont Emergency Preparedness Conference to help town and State personnel learn about best practices, connect within their regions, and practice for actual emergencies. Include emergency food security response in tabletop exercises.

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## VOICES OF VERMONTERS

“COVID-19 was so long, it really broke down the barrier between emergency feeding and social safety net we have all the time.”

“Disasters break silos in state government.”

“[What people] did in the pandemic is putting their stuff to the side and working together, saw some opportunities for state and local providers to work collaboratively. We need some structure that makes all of us pull together.”

## **G5: Ensure consistent, dignified access to nourishing, adequate, culturally responsive food, today and in the future**



Food insecurity disproportionately impacts priority populations in Vermont because systemic challenges create insecurities and barriers to access. Some of these barriers result in people needing prepared meals, not just groceries.

All people deserve a reliable and acceptable source of nourishing grocery food and prepared meals. The supplemental programs providing this food access, in turn, need consistent resources to continue to offer the food in a manner and variety that is responsive to cultural and dietary needs. By prioritizing reliable access to nourishing food, we will be able to directly address more people's immediate needs while working on longer term solutions to address the root causes of food insecurity and lack of access to nourishing food.

### **Keep in Mind**

As we succeed in creating food security through other strategies, barriers will diminish for people in Vermont. However, there will always be people who need certain food supports; for example, delivered prepared meals or medically tailored meals. Through improvement and full funding today, the supplemental food system will be prepared when emergencies arise.

## Strategies

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### STRATEGY G5.1

Strengthen and expand the state’s prepared meal infrastructure utilizing, to the extent possible, existing meal programs and entities (e.g., Meals on Wheels). Increase the capacity of schools, restaurants, grocery stores, and farms to provide prepared meals. Expand infrastructure and systems for delivery and access. ⚠

### STRATEGY G5.2

Sustainably fund Vermont’s current supplemental food access programs and systems while comprehensive policy substitutes—including state, non-governmental, and community-based programs—are put in place. ⚠

### STRATEGY G5.3

Ensure children in Vermont have access to free, nutritionally and culturally appropriate meals in any/all communal places of care and education—including, but not limited to, child care, early childhood education, school, after school, and summer programs. ⚠

### STRATEGY G5.4

Opt to provide the SNAP Restaurant Meals Program in Vermont. While eligibility is limited, it would increase overall SNAP enrollment. Support the Vermont Department for Children and Families (DCF) and its Economic Services Division to implement. Provide necessary equipment and technical assistance to small business owners who want to accept SNAP.

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## VOICES OF VERMONTERS

“As amazing as programs like [NOFA-VT’s food access programs] and sliding scale are, we could keep expanding them forever and nothing would really change until poverty and economic inequality are shifted. I have trouble envisioning what policy or government support could fundamentally change that. People aren’t hungry only because of inadequate food access programs. The more we create programs, the more we build systems that rely on the current inequity we have. But at the same time, I think these programs are amazing. Everything just has to be happening at the same time—emergency services, and longer-term sustainable change.”

“I’m a single mom with several kids so the free food for kids at school is fantastic.”

“Continue providing the great food supplemental programs like 3Squares[...]and Everyone Eats. I especially love the option of getting a healthy meal from Everyone Eats since I’m low income and not eligible for 3Squares. Food delivery to elderly low income people would be fantastic!”

“Keep funding! Meals on Wheels funding has been cut. We are not turning anyone away but the funding isn’t there. Funding food for all Vermonters!”

## G6: Invest in Vermont's town and village infrastructure

Objective G6



Maintaining and improving village infrastructure is a high-leverage area for food security and general emergency preparedness.

Functioning town infrastructure makes compact settlement possible and enables the development of housing at the scale necessary to house those already here and those who may come as climate change causes large-scale migration from the coasts. When people can live in towns and villages, it reduces rural sprawl and development pressure on working and potential farmland, eases transportation demand, supports the small businesses that respond to community needs, and creates a critical mass of people to support economic well-being and access to fresh food. Rural sprawl is also an inherently inequitable land use pattern, as it complicates access to and delivery of services and either ties people to car ownership or dependence on rides (including on-demand public transit where available); moreover, everyone under the age of 16, along with many seniors and people with disabilities, are unable to drive or may choose not to. Food security policy should not assume access to a personal vehicle.

### Keep in Mind

Vermont towns and villages range in capacity, staff, and ability to coordinate infrastructure projects or seek funding. Roadmap to 2035 implementation must involve town employees and regional planners, who may need targeted funds to enable their participation. Villages and downtowns are hubs for food access, housing, civic and social activity, and commerce.

# Strategies

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## STRATEGY G6.1

**Invest in the infrastructure of Vermont's villages, downtowns, and other settled areas. Create conditions to retain what exists and to move critical infrastructure away from flood hazards.**

## STRATEGY G6.2

**Build upon investments in village and downtown wastewater and drinking water infrastructure. Wastewater systems may make compact settlement (including housing) possible in some places. In villages and downtowns where existing food businesses are utilizing their own on-site septic and water, consider building new "community water and wastewater systems" to support their ability to expand and new food businesses to be created/located there.**

## STRATEGY G6.3

**Ensure villages, downtowns, and neighborhoods are flood-resilient and, when expanded, are done so away from flood hazards. Make this a priority of the Municipal Planning Grant program and the Flood Resilient Community program.**

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## VOICES OF VERMONTERS

"We also need systemic changes aimed at lifting community members out of poverty. Things like a just transition to renewable energy to alleviate energy poverty on a mass scale, major investments in affordable housing, availability of childcare, and investments in public transportation. These are the kinds of programs that don't simply materialize without our legislators and community leaders taking serious action and they all have a very direct impact on access to healthy, affordable foods."

"Who do you call if you are a rural elderly living without internet access, transportation or childcare?"

"We don't have supermarkets in places where people can get to them."

"I was part-time then full time at a new job during the pandemic, which had more income, but it was still a struggle to afford food and get access to it and the biggest barrier was transportation."

"I have a vehicle, but it had issues and I am immunocompromised so was concerned about in person interactions. I get that logistics of delivery are complicated, but delivery would have helped a lot. Navigating bus system are challenging, and maybe the location is not on a route. Brainstorming transportation ideas most important to Food Security Plan."

## G7: Make impactful investments in transportation in rural and urban Vermont



Among the barriers that threaten food access for different communities in Vermont, transportation-related barriers are significant.

Constrained transportation options mean constrained choices to create food security, especially for older populations, people with disabilities, low-income Vermonters, rural Vermonters, and Vermonters without driver's licenses. Barriers include Vermont's rural landscape and built environment, uneven personal vehicle ownership, inadequate public transportation, and sparse availability of culturally responsive foods for specific populations. The optimal government response to transportation-related barriers to food security will be collaborative and involve financial support for individuals, guidance from those most impacted by transportation barriers, investment in and improvement of transit service, and holistic planning for food access that takes these transportation barriers into consideration.

### Keep in Mind

Solutions that do not center the needs, requests, and capacities of affected populations will not be sustainable or practical in the long term. Relying on short-term infusions of resources, technologies people will not be able to utilize, or over-taxed volunteers should be avoided.

## Strategies

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### STRATEGY G7.1

Establish regular state-level communication and collaboration among relevant partners and offices to address gaps in transportation. Build durable relationships and partnerships across health, transportation, housing, agriculture, and other sectors, all of which are eager to work together to tackle the complexity of both rural and urban transportation barriers. ❗

### STRATEGY G7.2

Provide low-barrier, financial support for transportation such as vouchers, gas cards, or other items people request. This may also include financial support for personal transportation needs: shoes, snow tires, car inspections, repairs, no-interest loans, subsidies for cars, or other items. This strategy can also be adopted by communities. ❗

### STRATEGY G7.3

Increase investment in on-demand public transportation options, micro-transit models, flex-route transportation, and rideshare services. Build models that do not rely on volunteers. Expand rural transportation options to include more pickup and drop off locations, while coordinating schedules to ensure routes line up with the operating hours of these locations.

### STRATEGY G7.4

Ensure the safety, comfort, and dignity of those using public transportation systems. Outreach that highlights effective safety protocols and enforcement may then increase Vermonters' willingness to use public transportation.

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## VOICES OF VERMONTERS

"There is an incredible amount of driving that has to be done in order to get food. My family has to think really carefully about how much we drive and when, given gas prices. It's not necessarily a bad thing to have to be thoughtful about it, but some folks who may be an hour away from a grocery store or market or may not have a reliable vehicle or money for gas, may be doing without. How can communities work together to cut down on the need to drive far away for food."

"The high cost of transportation: auto, repairs, and tires make it hard to own a car. Inspections are challenging, too."

"I don't feel safe in a cab, so I won't take a ride from people I don't know or trust."

"Obviously, transportation is a huge issue. I mean, if you're in a rural area, you don't really know what you're going to do if you don't have transportation."

## G8: Utilize the health care system to identify and alleviate food insecurity



Vermonters without food security also report significantly poorer mental health, physical health, and general health. The health care system is extensive and many Vermonters intersect with some part of it.

From hospitals and primary care offices to treatment centers and long-term care facilities, operations vary depending on the needs of staff and, most importantly, the people they serve. By optimizing the health care system to identify and alleviate food insecurity, people living in Vermont will be provided with more of the resources they need to achieve and maintain their best health. Health care can be part of the overall approach to securing the food supply, supporting nutrition security, and developing a statewide culture of eating that honors health. This objective will benefit patients, health care providers, and farmers and, in many cases, will require governmental action.

### Keep in Mind

Community Health Workers (CHWs), present in and familiar with the needs of Vermont's communities, play a pivotal role in connecting people with food security resources.



## Strategies

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### STRATEGY G8.1

Collaborate with insurance carriers to ensure that visits to the grocery store, farmers markets, and other food distribution locations are reliably and consistently classified as health-related trips.

### STRATEGY G8.2

Invest in frameworks for the provision of produce prescriptions, with food sourced from both local farmers and conventional retail locations. Expand current programs and establish new ones in areas without programs, including southern Vermont and the Northeast Kingdom.

### STRATEGY G8.3

Expand and invest in medically tailored food supports, such as medically tailored meals, in collaboration with insurance carriers. These are increasingly popular interventions nationwide; optimize by ensuring meal delivery and at-home care is central to their structure, particularly in rural and high-poverty areas.

### STRATEGY G8.4

Expand universal screening for food security status within the health care system, using a validated screening tool. Pair with subsequent action for those identifying as food insecure. Such screening could be a source of data related to food security progress in Vermont.

### STRATEGY G8.5

Invest in Community Health Workers, who are well situated to understand the needs of distinct populations. CHWs already identify food insecure individuals, assist with paperwork and enrollment in food assistance programs, and connect individuals with culturally responsive food.

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## VOICES OF VERMONTERS

“Health care systems need to treat food security and nutrition equity as paramount to preventive care.”

“No one should go hungry or not have access to healthy food options.”

“How to make the healthy choice the default choice; making eating healthy easy—the burden of a healthy diet should not fall on caretakers.”

“If you think of food as vital to someone’s health, then it’s within this realm of access to health and health-related services.”

## A1: Provide direct, easy-to-access financial support to farmers who provide essential services to Vermont



Vermont's farmers are essential workers, whose services to Vermont residents encompass food production as well as ecological and social functions such as flood mitigation, carbon sequestration, and cultural stewardship.

Most Vermont farmers understand they are vulnerable to extreme conditions, but only 45% say they have the financial capacity to deal with the threats. Direct payments will provide a reliable bottom line for farmers to stay in business, provide for food security, and reduce risk and impact from climate change and other disruptions. Historical land and wage theft due to racism also leaves many farmers with fewer resources to grow a business than those allowed, over generations, to build and retain wealth or keep land and pass it down to heirs. Direct payments administered regardless of race or other social disadvantage will help, though direct payment that factor in historical disadvantage would be even better at achieving equity. This is an opportunity to prioritize Vermont's cultural, agricultural, and environmental values by providing direct support to the farm families who feed us and care for our natural resources.

### Keep in Mind

It is more expensive to farm in Vermont at a Vermont scale, and most of Vermont's farm businesses do not benefit from federal farm subsidies and emergency aid due to farm size, diversification of products, or other factors. Paying farm owners allows for the possibility that farmworkers will make a livable wage.

## Strategies

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### STRATEGY A1.1

**Streamline the application and approval system for farmer support programs, including grants and, eventually, direct payments. Create two one-stop farmer application portals in Vermont; one for all state programs and one for all non-governmental programs. ⚠**

### STRATEGY A1.2

**Create a Vermont farm emergency fund and other innovative funding mechanisms to provide immediate support to Vermont farms following extreme weather events. Rapid, easily accessible funding supports can make the difference between business survival and failure when climate change-related events occur. ⚠**

### STRATEGY A1.3

**Establish a system of direct payments to Vermont farmers on the basis that they provide public goods to the state. Possible funding or incentive mechanisms include the Meals and Rooms Tax, development and impervious surface fees, or incentives such as a tiered tax through “Current Use” (Vermont’s Use Value Appraisal) program or new refundable tax credit programs. ⚠**

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## VOICES OF VERMONTERS

“It is tough to grow good, healthy food with rising grain prices and everyone having less money to go around. Investing in our local food economy should be the focus so that farmers can keep farming and not have to worry about where the money is coming from to pay the bills, and they should be paid a fair wage for their work.”

“[We need] wealth-building for food system workers (local farm workers, migrant farm workers, food service industry [workers]).”

“[S]et aside funding to help farms and food pantries pivot when insecurities arise and they need to change their business model/operations.”

“[...]I haven't really raised my prices in many, many years, and the cost of everything has gone up. I want lower income people to have access to organic, nutrient dense food, and so how do I still make a living and make my product affordable?”

“The prices of food in the food store reflect government subsidies to large ag companies. The small Vermont farmer doesn't have a chance to compete with those prices, especially if they want to grow food ethically.”

“Food insecurity is a function of financial insecurity. Many farmers also struggle with financial insecurity.”

## A2: Accelerate the permanent conservation of Vermont's agricultural lands as working farms



Although 21.6% of Vermont's agricultural land is now conserved, the remainder is at risk of being lost, potentially permanently, to development or alternative land uses in the near future. Farmland conservation is one of the best ways to protect Vermont farmland from development, keep it in production, benefit from its ecological services, ensure local food production capacity, and maintain a thriving agricultural sector.

Conservation practices include a variety of pathways to keep land in active and sustainable production, including innovative models beyond traditional easement programs. Land conservation can also serve equity and justice if it is paired with removing barriers to land access for priority populations. The [2023 Vermont Community Resilience and Biodiversity Protection Act](#) directs the state to conserve 50% of the state's total land area by 2050. The resulting Vermont Conservation Strategy Initiative will help set targets for conservation of agriculturally significant lands and refine land conservation strategies. Conservation objectives must be guided by the findings of the Vermont Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the recommendations of the Land Access and Opportunity Board (LAOB).

### Keep in Mind

Strategies to remove barriers to farm ownership, provide direct payments to farmers, and update our food supply chain infrastructure must go together with land conservation.

## Strategies

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### STRATEGY A2.1

Using the baseline inventory of land conservation from Phase 1 of the Vermont Conservation Strategy Initiative, assess the current state of agricultural conservation in Vermont in relation to the locations of primary agricultural soils, floodplains, areas of compact settlement, and other political and ecological zones important to climate resilience and food security.

### STRATEGY A2.2

Based on the data from the Conservation Initiative and related research, set appropriate and ambitious targets for agricultural conservation and quantify the funding needed from all sources. Collaboration among farmland owners, land trusts, the LAOB, and agricultural organizations should determine conservation targets and may go beyond those set by the Conservation Initiative.

### STRATEGY A2.3

Dramatically expand federal, state, and philanthropic funding for traditional and innovative farmland conservation programs in order to achieve conservation targets. Robust and flexible funding is needed to accelerate the complex, time-consuming, and costly land conservation process. 

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## VOICES OF VERMONTERS

“We need to recognize food security depends on local food production. Protect and support local producers. There is a triangle between local producers, local distribution, and local consumption, and that is the key.”

“If we can find a way to feed people healthfully and affordably and keep their dollars in Vermont that would be the gold standard.”

“The [Land Access and Opportunity] Board exists because [...]historical barriers [to access for housing, land and land-based enterprise] continue to exist within systems of legal oppression and exclusion, economic domination, and exploitation of land, creating ongoing, pervasive challenges for historically marginalized and disadvantaged communities, and all those living at the intersections of marginalization, to access land, home security and welcoming communities.”

Initial Report of Land Access and Opportunity Board

## A3: Provide essential and urgently needed investments in agricultural supply-chain infrastructure



To save Vermont’s current farms, the State must immediately invest in supply chain infrastructure. This vital investment will also modernize and strengthen the viability of farming and food production for the future. “Supply chain” here refers to off-farm shared physical resources such as creameries, storage and refrigeration facilities, slaughter facilities, and a related distribution network including roads and trucks.

Surviving in the food system marketplace today requires sophisticated and efficient infrastructure. Farmers must respond to consumer trends, food safety regulations, and packaging and marketing needs while grappling with labor availability, and downward price pressure from wholesale buyers. Given the small scale of many Vermont farms, market access will depend on a robust combination of on-farm plus shared off-farm resources. Small and mid-sized farms have to compete in a highly consolidated marketplace in which large national and global agribusinesses leverage their scale to restrict market access and, additionally, are subsidized and supported by federal policy and investment. Providing state funding for diversified farming and supply chain infrastructure helps to level the playing field and enables our smaller farms greater access to in-state and regional markets.

### Keep in Mind

Farming and food production are much more capital intensive than ever before. Supply chain infrastructure investments would also ensure a more decentralized and regionally focused food system, which will be more resilient in the face of climate change and other emergencies.

## Strategies

### STRATEGY A3.1

**Allocate funds for expansion of distribution infrastructure (cold, frozen, and dry storage as well as cross-docking capacity, strategically located in different parts of the state) and related technology. This will enable small- and mid-scale producers to meet consumer demand, and more easily and affordably get their products to in-state wholesale buyers, plus New England and New York markets. ⚠**

### STRATEGY A3.2

**To increase producer access to Vermont distribution networks and in- and out-of-state markets, dedicate substantial funding to VAAFMs Agriculture Development Program, to support larger scale infrastructure and processing investment needs of meat, maple, grain, produce, and perennial crop industries. ⚠**

## VOICES OF VERMONTERS

“Would love to see an action plan that provides support for VT food producers and make sure that food is getting into the hands of Vermonters that need it. Can we invest in strengthening our farms and food production, then creating channels to get food to Vermonters in a sustainable, long term way?”

“I think COVID and its lingering effects have shown that food security is not just about access but also supply chain resilience. I think work on food security should take both into account.”

“We have been learning recently due to COVID, inflation, our climate crisis, etc. that supply chains can and will be disrupted. In Vermont, we need state legislation to support Vermont farmers—perhaps even subsidize Vermont farmers so that they can scale their operation, processing, and storage capabilities—and sell food at a lower price.”

“Increase the state’s capacity to produce/process/use local foods as well as move foods sourced from outside the state.”

## A4: Establish easier and equitable access to farmland and on-farm infrastructure



Vermont producers must have appropriate agricultural land and infrastructure in order to succeed in business, but current and future generations of Vermont farmers face significant challenges.

Starting and growing a farm operation has become increasingly expensive in terms of labor, unpredictable and severe weather, operating expenses, infrastructure expense, deferred maintenance, and land purchase. All of these factors combine to make for a very difficult environment for farmers to be successful. Farmers from priority populations may face additional challenges due to bias, language and culture differences, loan refusals, and other structural barriers. Specific redress for the historical inequities that have prevented Black, Indigenous, and PGM (people of the global majority) access to generational wealth, including land, must be provided, in the form of resources or programs that go beyond general support for new and beginning farmers.

### Keep in Mind

Permanent farmland protection plays a critical role in the economic transformation and ownership transitions that Vermont agriculture is facing, but conservation alone will not ensure the survival of Vermont's agriculture sector. In addition, though this objective relates to strategies regarding land conservation and agricultural commercial production, it also encompasses land access for non-commercial food production in support of food sovereignty.



## Strategies

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### STRATEGY A4.1

**Robustly fund low-cost and flexible farmland ownership and infrastructure financing programs including, but not limited to, revolving bridge funding programs, revolving loan funds operated by and for priority populations, and low- or zero-interest financing for farmers making infrastructure changes and improvements.**


### STRATEGY A4.2

**Continue to investigate and fund alternative and community-supported land ownership, including co-tenure arrangements, community land trusts, collective agriculture on public lands, and farmland investment cooperatives. Policy incentives, public funds and/or easement permissions may be critical to repurpose, remove, or add infrastructure to support new businesses and new business models.**

### STRATEGY A4.3

**Increase the funding and support for farm service provider position(s) focused on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and located at BIPOC-run Vermont food system organizations. Other farm viability programs can diversify their workforce, deepen competencies and relationships, and better align with and leverage the goals and strengths of BIPOC farmers and BIPOC-led groups.**

### STRATEGY A4.4

**Vermont land that includes primary agricultural soils has already been set aside for farming as part of Act 250's "onsite mitigation permit condition." Programming should be established to ensure onsite mitigated lands are in active farming use, particularly by matching available land with Black, Indigenous, and People of Color and other new or beginning farmers facing current and historical barriers to land access. **

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## VOICES OF VERMONTERS

"It can be really hard to produce affordable food in Vermont. So maybe it's about making sure there's enough financial resources so farmers can[...]the farmers know how to grow the food[...]it's about lowering the financial barriers. I feel confident about farmers' ability to grow lots of delicious nutritious food—it's about who has the money to access it."

"One big issue is land access and the cost of land for people who want to farm. As land prices go up and people retire from farming, or get out because they can't make any money from it, we're going to have fewer and fewer people growing food in the state. So less local production."

## C1: Integrate food access into town plans across Vermont

Objective C1



Food access and security are impacted not only by state and federal agricultural policies, but also by local decisions in municipal and regional plans around topics like land use regulation, transportation and mobility, water quality, waste management, and more.

Municipal and regional planning tools can integrate food access with other socioeconomic issues, such as housing and transportation, that influence food security for communities and individuals.

The [Farm to Plate Local Planning for Food Access Toolkit](#) guides communities and planners through improving food access within a municipal and regional plan. This toolkit is an existing and proven resource communities can use to develop strategies that suit their specific landscape and population. Plans alone won't solve hunger, but the planning process can raise awareness and build broad public support for food access initiatives. The tools can increase food and land access, and address food sovereignty. Town planning is also a way to uplift and support the leadership of food system champions who are not a part of, or who are excluded from, professionalized statewide roles.

### Keep in Mind

While this section focuses on integrating food access within the planning process, to achieve food security and equitable food access there must be follow-through after the planning stages. Implementing a town plan is not something communities can usually do alone; more often, it requires financial support from federal and state government partners and organizations.

## Strategies

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### STRATEGY C1.1

**During land use planning and rural development processes, use a suite of tools, including new and emergent ones, that better support the equitable use of agricultural land as working farms. This includes integrating agricultural businesses as a consideration during economic development planning. ⓘ**

### STRATEGY C1.2

**Use traditional land use planning tools to guide and support development of food access venues (including retail points) that will be accessible to and meet the needs of the local community.**

### STRATEGY C1.3

**Use the community input phase of town and municipal planning processes as an opportunity to build new relationships and support for food access issues across town groups. This strategy could be used by town personnel, elected officials, business owners, or interested community members.**

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## VOICES OF VERMONTERS

“Consider accessing Regional planning and town plans to set up systematic food plans local-to-state and state-to-local.”

“Even in Vermont, we have[...]small communities with no grocery stores. Families may not have transport to get to another town to shop.”

“I applied for fuel assistance and got enough for one minimum delivery. Trying to pay down credit cards, my house is falling apart, had to buy new appliances. The cost of food is high.”

“Don’t let corporations be the ambassadors for food; let there be a town council that takes on food in each town and is freely educated about what’s available to grow/produce locally.”

“Look at where else people are receiving regular services (health care, for example) and strengthen collaboration.”

## C2: Expand local collaboration for effective delivery of daily and emergency food security resources



Vermont has the opportunity to design an excellent food security emergency response system using recent lessons learned. State support, funding, and coordination are necessary to ensure systems and structures are in place and ready to be activated during emergencies ([Objective G4](#)).

However, cooperation with towns, community groups, service providers, and local leaders is essential. These ensure the efficacy of state emergency operations by providing outreach, tailoring implementation, and liaising with state and federal operators. They are a direct line to the daily needs and wants of the most vulnerable Vermonters. Increasing their collaboration and communication with each other and with the State can expand access to resources and guarantee that the needs of vulnerable Vermonters come first. The broad strategic suggestions here are an overview, keeping in mind that the details are specific to individual communities and towns.

### Keep in Mind

The strategies here are suggested ideas for towns to connect to the State on actions the Roadmap recommends. They are not meant to imply that towns and communities are solely responsible for ensuring the food security of residents or community members.

## Strategies

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### STRATEGY C2.1

**Create purposeful local redundancies in food security leadership and information-sharing. Clearly identify official and unofficial trusted community leaders (e.g., spiritual leaders, community elders, town clerks, school staff, etc.), and build a communication system to quickly share resources and information amongst them. This will improve the reach and continuity of existing services as well as emergency response.**

### STRATEGY C2.2

**Expand local and regional partnerships for the purpose of coordinating efforts to reach food insecure Vermonters in a direct and dignified manner during emergencies. This will improve existing services as well as emergency response.**

### STRATEGY C2.3

**When creating locally tailored information resources, be sure to both draw from and contribute to Vermont 211 (the statewide resource database that provides information to all Vermonters). Localized resource guides can be effective because they contain hyperlocal information and are affiliated with local, trusted entities. Systems should be put in place at the local level to ensure information is regularly updated and accurate. When informed by and connected to local information, Vermont 211 can then fulfill its role as an emergency and daily resource.**

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## VOICES OF VERMONTERS

“Down here in this area we have really worked it out by having nonprofits and for-profits work together to get food out.”

“Please partner with as many similarly minded groups as possible, even if the connections aren’t as immediately obvious. We need to pool our voices and work together.”

“We need a central hub or services person who can share all required information on programs/services. Someone who is informed about everything, so people don’t have to hunt for the information. Person could be available at the library one day a week?”

“Community agency is critical, important to listen to what the community needs and wants.”

“[During the pandemic] the regular ‘info sharing’ meetings of all kinds around the state were very important—including statewide, topical, and subregional.”

## C3: Improve local food access while working on full food security in Vermont



True food security will mean that individuals do not have to rely on charity. In the interim, improvements in supplemental food delivery will still make a real difference in people's lives. There are many Vermonters in need of food who do not utilize available food supports, and many documented reasons for this.

Strategies pertaining to statewide organizations and agencies are detailed elsewhere in this Roadmap; here, we summarize strategies related to local implementation (see online appendices for a complete list of suggestions generated by the community feedback). Collaborative efforts among community organizations can expand access to food and knowledge of resources and ensure that the needs of priority populations are met.

### Keep in Mind

Access to supplemental and charitable food can be fair and equitable when: those accessing the food participate in designing the access; the food is affordable or free; there are no bureaucratic barriers such as lengthy paperwork; the location is safe and physically accessible; the process is free from stigma; information is readily available and in a familiar language; hours of operation coincide with hours that community members are available; people can transport the food; people want and are able to eat the provided food; people are able to prepare the food they receive, or the food is already prepared.

## Strategies

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### STRATEGY C3.1

Ensure local users and priority populations guide the design of community-based supplemental program outreach and implementation. Compensate people for their expertise and build relationships with trusted leaders. Offer programs at easily accessible times and places, and use both digital and non-digital methods of outreach.

### STRATEGY C3.2

Tailor programs to the stated needs of the most vulnerable in a given community—for example, if housing security is low, develop food supports that do not rely on refrigeration, reheating, or equipment.

### STRATEGY C3.3

Evaluate whether local food access initiatives are convenient to the relationships and routines people already have. Make free food available in places people already go to regularly, such as schools, doctors' offices, early childcare settings, and senior care facilities, so no additional trips are needed.

### STRATEGY C3.4

Replicate Vermont's successful, localized food spaces, to build social ties, promote food sovereignty, and distribute free and subsidized food. Examples in Vermont communities include gardens, ovens, freezers, and producer markets.

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## VOICES OF VERMONTERS

"If there are physical/logistical barriers, create drop-off sites or other mechanisms that don't necessarily put the burden on the farmer to create that distribution—especially for rural folks."

"I wish there was a way to lessen the stigma of asking for help. I work in a school and many families are embarrassed to admit they need help providing food for their children."

"Often people who did not grow up food insecure do not know how to access free food without shame. This can be a huge barrier to feeding families. Community networking would be an excellent way to alleviate this."

"Stigma around food insecurity is deeply ingrained into our culture. Ensuring that Vermonter's have access to food in a dignified manner (low barrier, able to access in a variety of ways, as anonymous as possible) is essential."

"We do a pretty good job of making food available. We do a terrible job in outreach—to find the people who need food but for many reasons do not come to get it."

# Collaboration

The Roadmap to 2035 is ambitious and necessary. If we truly want to secure our food supply in a changing climate, address the social inequities that perpetuate poverty and hunger, and ensure that everyone in Vermont has access to abundant, culturally responsive food, with dignity, we need to work together to enact this Roadmap.

A food-secure Vermont by 2035 requires forging new partnerships and strengthening existing ones. Vermont community input resoundingly called for a new level of statewide communication and collaboration. This will mitigate unnecessary duplication of efforts, identify gaps, and ensure we are building upon existing strengths and success. Organizations, individuals, and businesses will collaborate, bringing together voices from both the public and private sectors. The participation of local communities, and of people directly affected by specific implementation activities will be necessary to create equity and justice. Specifically, people in rural Vermont, those living in poverty, elders, people with disabilities, those identifying as Black, Indigenous, a person of color, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or Queer—our priority populations—must lead and inform the work.

Here we present the necessary collaborative structures and supports that became clear as we charted the Roadmap. There is a role for every one of us, and it will take every one of us.

## **Vermont Legislative Authority and Office of Food Security**

To achieve food security for all by 2035, it will be critically important for the Vermont legislature and the Administration to commit to the policy and funding priorities outlined in Roadmap strategies.

## **Statewide Food Security Coalition within the Farm to Plate Network**

A newly formed statewide Food Security Coalition will actively support Roadmap implementation, in close communication the Office of Food & Nutrition Security as well as the Legislative committees of jurisdiction. Housed within the Vermont Farm to Plate Network, the Coalition will include representatives from all sectors intersecting the Roadmap, including but not limited to: transportation, health care, housing, farming, business, government, education, etc. The Coalition will evaluate progress toward Roadmap objectives annually and assess when to begin new objectives. The Coalition structure will be finalized by end of 2024.

## **Community-Based Councils**

An early Roadmap action is designing and replicating a multi-racial, diverse entity for ensuring that affected communities and all regions of Vermont are represented and consulted, and can engage their towns and communities in fulfillment of the Roadmap. The structures will be in place and operating by the end of 2024.

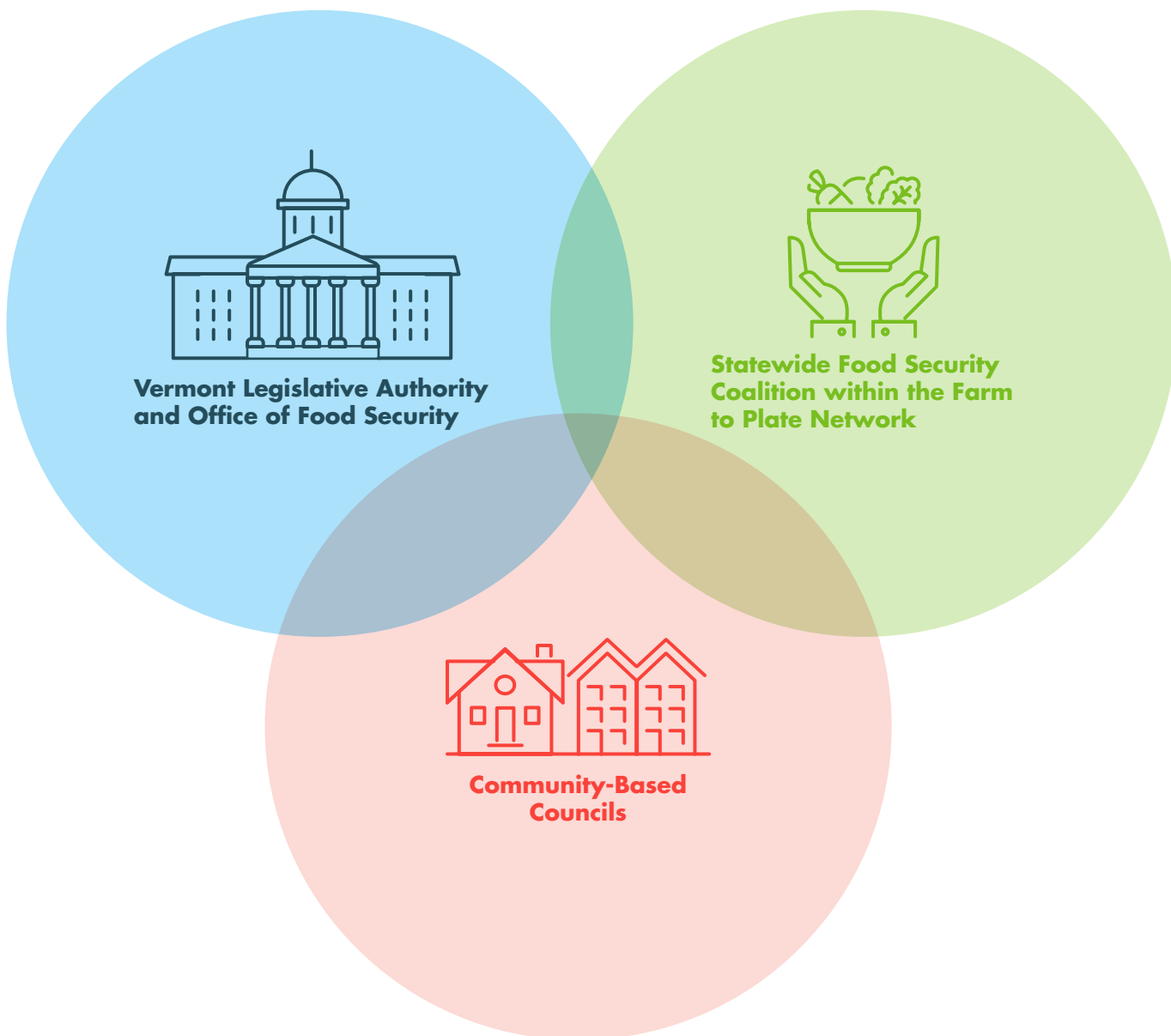
## **Systems for All**

Participation in these groups must be compensated. Interpretation services and accommodations for individuals with disabilities must be offered for those needing assistance.

## **Financial Support**

The Roadmap Coalition and Community-Based Councils will require ample, dedicated financial resources to sustain the work through 2035 and beyond, taking into account the urgency of the devastating effects of climate change. Some of the strategies listed in the plan include details on budgeting and financial requirements. The proposed Office of Food & Nutrition Security in consultation with the Coalition will be responsible for defining costs for strategies that require funding but do not currently have this information listed. Those involved in governing should note that some strategies will help to strengthen our state's economy while others stand alone as a public good, meant for the betterment and improved quality of life for all Vermonters.





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**VSJF.ORG**

3 Pitkin Ct #301E

Montpelier, VT 05602

802-828-1260

Design: Pluck, [pluckvermont.com](http://pluckvermont.com)