

city of  
**HARTFORD**  
**ADVISORY**  
**COMMISSION**  
on **FOOD POLICY**

annual report and  
policy recommendations

**2020**







## CITY OF HARTFORD

### ADVISORY COMMISSION ON FOOD POLICY

c/o Hartford Food System, 190 Wethersfield Ave, Hartford, CT 06114

Phone: 860.296.9325 Fax: 860.296.8326 Email: hartfordfood@hartfordfood.org

#### 2020 Food Policy Commissioners

**Valerie Bryan**  
Hartford Resident

**Mary Cockram**  
Frog Hollow  
Consulting

**Angela G.  
Colantonio**  
Urban Alliance

**Valentine Doyle**  
Hartford Resident

**Benjamin Dubow**  
Riverfront Family  
Church

**Yahaira Escibano**  
Foodshare

**Brunella Ibarrola**  
Hartford Public  
Schools Food and  
Child Nutrition  
Services

**Andrew May**  
Hartford Resident

**Martha Page**  
(Chair)  
Hartford Food  
System

**Sofia Segura-Pérez**  
Hispanic Health  
Council

**Cary Wheaton**  
Forge City Works

January 27, 2021

The Honorable Luke Bronin  
Mayor of the City of Hartford  
550 Main Street  
Hartford, CT 06103

Dear Mayor Bronin,

I am pleased to submit this report on behalf of the City of Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy. This Annual Report outlines the progress of the Commission over the past year and our next steps to advance these policies. We trust you will find that the Commission remains committed to our and the City's goal of ensuring that all Hartford residents have permanent access to a safe, affordable, and healthy diet.

The coronavirus pandemic has been described as unprecedented, and it has certainly presented many challenges. However, some of those challenges are the same challenges that many Hartford families have faced in the past: food insecurity, unemployment, low access to fresh food, and more. The pandemic has heightened inequality across the country: while many white, white-collar, and high income people have largely been able to stay home, pay for grocery delivery, and order takeout, many Black, working class, and low income people have had to continue working in-person, risking infection at work or waiting in line for emergency food. These are not new challenges: our food system was built on the labor of low income people and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) to benefit white, high income people. Our policy recommendations seek to address the immediate needs of Hartford residents, but we recognize the collective responsibility we have to build a more equitable society in the wake of the pandemic.

We thank you and your staff for your continued support and consideration as we strive for total food security in the City of Hartford. As always, we encourage you to call on any of us at any time to discuss the state of the City's food system.

Sincerely,

*Martha Page*

Martha Page  
Chair





**CITY OF HARTFORD**  
**ADVISORY COMMISSION ON FOOD POLICY**  
**2020 Annual Report**

**Table of Contents**

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
History of the Commission	2
Food Policy Commissioners	3
Overview of 2019-20 HACFP Work	4
<b>COVID-19 Impact on Hartford</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Policy Recommendations:</b>	<b>10</b>
Food business and job recovery	10
Increase food security through nutrition programs	11
Develop a plan to increase food grown and processed in Hartford	12
<b>Proposed New Commission Structure</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Legislative Strategy</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Conclusions</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>16</b>



# Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy

## 2020 Annual Report

### *Introduction*

The Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy was established by City ordinance in 1991 to implement recommendations from the Mayor's Task Force on Hunger. Continuously operational since then, its purpose is to integrate all City agencies in a common effort to improve the availability of safe and nutritious food at reasonable prices for all Hartford residents, particularly those in need.

The original goals of the Commission are:

1. To eliminate hunger as an obstacle to a happy, healthy and productive life in the City;
2. To ensure that a wide variety of safe and nutritious food is available for City residents;
3. To ensure that access to food is not limited by economic status, location or other factors beyond a resident's control; and
4. To ensure that the price of food in the City remains at a level approximating the level for the state.



Part of a mural at the Grow Hartford garden at the corner of Main and Park Street.  
Photo Credit: Hartford Food System

Those goals continue to be relevant today. A recent study by the University of Connecticut found that 33.3% of Hartford residents were food insecure, the highest rate among all Connecticut municipalities based on 2015 survey data from DataHaven (Boehm et al., 2019). Food security is physical and economic access to adequate food at all times; food insecurity is any situation in which a person, family, or population cannot obtain adequate food for any amount of time for any reason. Significant socioeconomic and health disparities, including limited and inconsistent access to affordable, fresh, and healthy foods, persist in Hartford and the Greater Hartford area. Rates of food insecurity are much greater for Black and Latinx families. The median household income in Hartford is \$36,278 compared to the Hartford County median household income of \$75,148; this underscores a major disparity between the urban core and the surrounding towns, which benefit from the government and nonprofit services, as well as cultural and other entertainment experiences in Hartford (Census Bureau American Communities Survey 5-year estimate, 2019). As the ability to access healthy food is linked directly to socioeconomic status, food insecurity and diet-related diseases are entrenched problems for many Hartford residents.

## *History of the Commission*

As one of the oldest food policy councils in the country, the Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy (HACFP) has a long history of advocacy to end hunger. The mission and goals have remained the same, but over the years, the Commission has taken on different structures and used different strategies to engage Commissioners, residents, and City officials to achieve its goals. Commission activities have included:

- Using a \$3,000 - \$5,000 annual budget from the City to complete program work such as surveys or community events; the Commission currently does not have an operating budget
- Grocery store price surveys and data collection about hunger and federal nutrition program participation to assess need in the City
- Advocacy to state and national legislators on issues such as welfare reform and child nutrition
- In the 1990's, development of a new bus line to provide direct access to a grocery store just north of the city line
- Advocating for the development of multiple grocery stores over the years, including the Stop & Shop on New Park Avenue, and current efforts to bring a grocery store to the North End
- Convened city leaders and grocery executives to demand that food was priced the same in Hartford as it was in surrounding towns
- Creation and dissolution of working groups as needed to address food policy issues
- Worked with the City Planning and Zoning Commission to permit urban agriculture throughout the city
- Lobbied the City to hire a local vendor to administer the Summer Food Service Program
- Celebrating the work of food activists and school food service programs through community events like the Feeding Hartford Awards (ongoing) and the Golden Muffin Awards (discontinued)
- Encouraging composting at food businesses through informational meetings and advocacy
- Working with a staffperson from the Mayor's office who would attend monthly meetings to report back to the Mayor
- Issuing periodic guides about pandemic policy recommendations and food pantry schedule changes starting in March 2020

The Commission's work has included legislative advocacy at the state and national level, negotiations with large companies, grassroots organizing, and education. Over the years, the Commission has shown adaptability and a willingness to try new strategies to achieve its goals. Many of these strategies are worth revisiting to tackle the complex problems Hartford faces today.



## *Food Policy Commissioners*

There are currently 11 volunteers who serve the Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy. Some are individuals who reside in Hartford; others represent nonprofits or city agencies that address food issues in Hartford. They are:

**Valerie Bryan**, *Hartford resident.*

**Mary Cockram**, *Frog Hollow Consulting, Hartford resident.*

**Angela G. Colantonio**, *Urban Alliance.*

**Valentine Doyle**, *Hartford resident.*

**Benjamin Dubow**, *Riverfront Family Church, Hartford resident.*

**Yahaira Escribano**, *Foodshare, Hartford resident.*

**Brunella Ibarrola**, *Hartford Public Schools Food and Child Nutrition Services.*

**Andrew May**, *Hartford resident.*

**Martha Page** (Chair), *Hartford Food System, Hartford resident.*

**Sofia Segura-Pérez**, *Hispanic Health Council.*

**Cary Wheaton**, *Forge City Works, Hartford resident.*

Grace Yi of the Office of Sustainability is the commission's liaison in the City. Shana Brierley currently serves as a liaison to the Commission from the City of Hartford Department of Health and Human Services. Meg Hourigan of Hartford Food System serves as the staffperson for the Commission. In addition to their service on the Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy, many commissioners contribute to the food system of Hartford in other ways, such as Andrew May's volunteer work with food pantries; Val Bryan, Andrew, and Mary Cockram's work encouraging residential composting; and Val's volunteer work on school gardens. Commissioners also work at organizations such as Hartford Food System (Martha Page), which operates the North End Farmers' Market and Hartford Mobile Market to expand options for fresh produce throughout the city, among other programs; Foodshare (Yahaira Escribano), which is the regional food bank; and Hartford Public Schools (Brunella Ibarrola), which strives to increase local produce in school meals and maintain school gardens throughout the city.

**There are currently 4 vacant seats on the Commission.\*\*\***

*\*\*\* The Commission is currently working on revising the membership from 15 to 21 commissioners, but until those changes are finalized, 4 seats are currently vacant. The Commission consists of Hartford residents, city officials, and representatives of food, farm, and health-related organizations such as the Hispanic Health Council and Hartford Food System. The Commission has prioritized increasing the number of Hartford residents and people of color on the Commission. We value diversity in race, economic status, and gender; people who have experienced food insecurity themselves are especially welcome to participate. If you are interested in joining the Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy, contact [Meg@HartfordFood.org](mailto:Meg@HartfordFood.org).*

## Overview of 2019-2020 HACFP Work

This year, the Commission has continued to work towards greater food security for Hartford residents by bringing together diverse stakeholders including Hartford residents and representatives from various organizations working on food and public health in the City. The group conducts monthly meetings on the second Wednesday of every month from 3:30 to 5:15 pm; since April, the Commission has met virtually using Zoom.

To reach community members, the Commission uses Facebook, Twitter, and a newsletter, all of which grew in audience this year.



285  
Follows  
(+77%)



166  
Followers  
(+44%)



249  
Subscribers  
(+13%)

## Feeding Hartford Awards



*Nate Rivera is the individual youth winner of the 2020 Feeding Hartford Awards.*

The Commission's annual awards ceremony was rescheduled to a virtual event in September this year. 21 nominees in the categories of adult individual, youth individual, secular non-profit, faith-based organization, business, and government agency were recognized. Winners in each category were presented with a citation from the mayor and an original Hartford-made painting by local artists Julie Bergeron and Christina Solem.

### This year's awardees include:

- In the **youth individual** category, Forge City Works alum **Nate Rivera** won this year. As a junior sous chef at Firebox, he was serving more than 2,000 meals per week. He hopes to run his own food truck someday.
- In the **adult individual** category, **Joan Dauber** was this year's winner. Joan founded the first hospital food pantry at Saint Francis hospital over forty years ago. The Joan C. Dauber Food Bank distributed more than 144 tons of food to almost 1,800 households last year.
- In the **secular non-profit** category, **Community Health Services** was this year's winner. Partnering with Foodshare, they offer bi-weekly food bag distributions, amounting to more than 150 bags of food for clients every other Friday.
- In the **business** category, **Banh Meee** was this year's winner. As a local restaurant, Banh Meee trains many youth for their first culinary jobs in Hartford, ensuring employment and quality culinary experiences in Hartford for years to come.

- In the **faith-based** category, **Bible Way Temple Nation** was the winner. Bible Way Temple Nation is a Mobile Foodshare partner in addition to operating CT Transition House, which ensures clients get not only food but also referrals to needed community resources. Their basic needs program serves 400 people per month.
- In the **government agency** category, **Jana Engle of the Connecticut Department of Social Services** was the winner. Jana manages the SNAP Employment and Training Program for the whole state. Working with Foodshare and Connecticut Food Bank, she has distributed over 120,000 packages of food through the programming.



*Julie Bergeron painted this portrait of and for Joan Dauber, who won the Feeding Hartford Award in the adult individual category.*

The Commission chose these awardees from an incredible group of nominees this year, including **Sebastian Kolodziej** of **House of Bread**, who was recognized posthumously by the Commission. Other nominees included **Connie Bird**, an urban farmer; **Shonta Browdy** of the **Mount Moriah Community Garden**; **Dr. Susan Masino**, a community gardener; **Mary Lee Morrison**, an urban farm volunteer; **Sarah Rose Nunes**, an urban farmer; **Rodger Phillips** of **Sub Edge Farm**; **Tenaya Taylor**, a community advocate with **Summer of Solutions Hartford**; **Pastor Donald Padgett** of the **Promise Zone Board**; **Gillian Walcott** of **Saint Francis Hospital**; **Sister Helen Feagin** of the **Christ Church of Deliverance**; **Father Steve Klots** at **South Kent School**, the **Erdkinder Program** at **Annie Fisher Montessori Magnet School**; and **Blue State Coffee**.

The Commission collected messages of gratitude from the community for people who supported one another during the pandemic. Community members offered gratitude to **Alyssa Jones** of the **Little City Sprouts Program**; **John Randell Martin**; **Emmanuel Rivera**; **Shana Smith** and **Nikki Knowles** of the **Hartford Mobile Market** and **North End Farmers' Market**; **C-Town** on **Wethersfield Ave.**; **Chef Jendayi Scott Miller**; **Shanelle Morris** of **Grow Hartford**; **Mutual Aid Hartford**; **Laverne Frazier**; Commissioner **Andrew May**; the **food and nutrition staff** of **Hartford Public Schools**; and **volunteers** at the **Foodshare Rentschler Field food distribution**. These volunteers and staff worked quickly and tirelessly to get food to people who needed it during this pandemic.

## Pandemic Guide and Response

1 DE MAYO DE 2020

### Escuelas Públicas de Hartford Sirven Comidas

Los niños pueden recibir comidas mientras que las escuelas estén cerradas.

Todas las escuelas en Hartford están cerradas hasta nuevo aviso. Línea Directa de los Servicios de Salud de las escuelas: (860) 695-8760

Cualquier niño, de 18 años o menos, se puede buscar comida en cualquier sitio listado a la derecha. **Los padres y los tutores pueden recoger comida para sus niños.** Practique el distanciamiento social durante la recogida para la seguridad de todos.

Las comidas se distribuyen los lunes, miércoles y viernes de 9 a.m. a 12 p.m. Los lunes y miércoles, se proporcionarán dos días de comida. Los viernes, se proporcionarán tres días de comida.



Se puede encontrar más información, incluyendo una mapa y posibles cambios de locales en el sitio de web: [https://www.hartfordschools.org/understanding\\_coronavirus/](https://www.hartfordschools.org/understanding_coronavirus/)

- Achievement First**  
(305 Greenfield St.)
- Classical Magnet School**  
(85 Woodland St.)
- Rawson School**  
(260 Holcomb St.)
- Weaver High School**  
(415 Granby St.)
- Global Communications Academy**  
(85 Edwards St.)
- SAND School**  
(1750 Main St.)
- Wish Museum Schools**  
(350 Barbour St.)
- Hartford Public High School**  
(55 Forest St.)
- Kennelly School**  
(180 White St.)
- Moylan School - ELAMS**  
(101 Catherine St.)
- Parkville Community School**  
(47 New Park Ave.)
- Sanchez School**  
(176 Babcock St.)
- Bellizzi School**  
(215 South St.)
- Betances Early Reading School**  
(42 Charter Oak Ave.)
- Burr School**  
(400 Wethersfield Ave.)
- Hartford Magnet Trinity College Academy**  
(53 Vernon St.)
- MD Fox School**  
(470 Maple Ave.)

DECEMBER 4, 2020

### Foodshare Mobile Stops

Foodshare is distributing food in Hartford.

To get updates about the mobile Foodshare schedule on your cell phone, text **FOODSHARE to 85511**. Check [foodshare.org](http://foodshare.org) for updates.

*NOTE: This list may be inaccurate. The best way to check on a stop is on Foodshare's webpage or call 860-856-4321.*

**MONDAYS:** 12/7, 12/21 (every other Monday)

- 9 AM - 9:45 AM: **Charter Oak Community Health Center**, Salvation Army parking lot, 225 Washington St.
- 12:15 PM - 1:00 PM: **UMC of Hartford**, 571 Farmington Ave.
- 1:30 PM - 2:00 PM: **Grace Worship Center Church**, 750 Wethersfield Ave.

**MONDAYS:** 12/14, 12/28 (every other Monday)

- 9:45 AM - 10:15 AM: **Family Life Education**, George Day Park, 46 Orange St.

**WEDNESDAYS:** 12/16, 12/30 (every other Wednesday)

- 9:00 AM - 9:45 AM: **Pope Park**, 30 Pope Park Dr. across from Arroyo Rec Center
- 11:30 AM - 12:15 PM: **Cathedral of St. Joseph**, back parking lot, 809 Asylum Ave.

**THURSDAYS:** 12/10, 12/24 (every other Thursday)

- 9:00 AM - 9:45 AM: **North End Senior Center**, 85 Coventry St.

- 10:30 AM - 11:15 AM: **Grace Church of God**, 235 Wethersfield Ave.

- 1:15 PM - 2:00 PM: **SANA Apartments**, 1630 Main St.

**THURSDAYS:** 12/17, 12/31 (every other Thursday)

- 10:15 AM - 11:00 AM: **New Mt. Moriah Baptist Church**, 222 Barbour St.

- 1:15 PM - 2:00 PM: **Church of the Good Shepherd**, 155 Wyllys St.

**FRIDAYS:** 12/11 (every other Friday except Christmas)

- 9:00 AM - 9:45 AM: **Church of the Most High God**, 692 Garden St.

**FRIDAYS:** 12/18 (every other Friday)

- 8:45 AM - 9:15 AM: **Salvation Army**, 100 Nelson St., corner of Nelson & Barbour. **Pre-register 1 day in advance: 860-543-8419**

- 9:00 AM - 9:45 AM: **St. Augustine Church** at Webster Theater, 31 Webster St.

- 9:45 AM - 10:30 AM: **Catholic Charities - Asylum Hill Family Center**, 60 Gillett St.

- 11:30 AM - 12:15 PM: **Bible Way Temple Nation**, 3053 Main St.



Starting in March, the Commission has been producing regular guides with information about food pantry schedule changes, school meal locations, changes in SNAP and unemployment policies, recommendations for grocery shopping and meeting other needs during the pandemic, and policy recommendations to mitigate the damage of the pandemic. The guide is available in English and Spanish.

Monthly Commission and working group meetings have served as vital sources of information. Upholding its original charge of uniting city agencies for a common cause of food security, the Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy streamlined communication as commissioners and guests shared important program updates, interruptions, and changes with each other and the public.



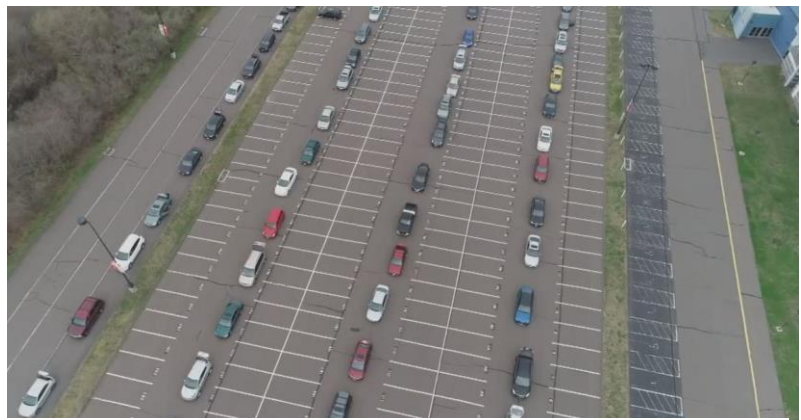
## ***COVID-19's Impact on Food in Hartford: What We Know So Far***

Since March, more than 12,000 (about 10%) Hartford residents have contracted the novel coronavirus; it has taken nearly 250 lives (Connecticut Department of Public Health and CT Data, as of 22 January 2021). These lives, among more than 2 million globally, can never be recovered, nor can their value be calculated (World Health Organization Coronavirus Disease [COVID-19] Dashboard, as of 22 January 2021). They leave behind family and friends who will be collectively processing the grief and trauma of this period for years to come.

Impacts on the economy, education, food supply chain, healthcare system, and other areas of life are easier to calculate, but we won't know the full extent of this ongoing crisis's impact for years. Businesses, particularly restaurants, have shuttered in Hartford and throughout Connecticut. This includes Firebox Restaurant, the farm to table restaurant operated by Forge City Works with a job training mission. Restaurants are a hub of culture and social life in any town. Nationwide, accommodation and food services decreased by 88% (Bureau of Economic Analysis, US Department of Commerce). Closures and reduction in hours and services have led to soaring unemployment rates; 161 per 1,000 Hartford residents filed for unemployment between March 15 and August 2 (CT Data Collaborative). In November, Hartford's unemployment rate was 13.7%, the highest in the state (CT Department of Labor). Throughout Connecticut, more than 500,000 people have applied for unemployment during the pandemic (CT Data Collaborative). Unemployment has not affected everyone equally: in June, the national unemployment rate was 9% compared to 15% for Black workers, 15% for Latino workers, 14% for Asian/Pacific Islander workers, 12% for Native American workers, and 14% for workers of two or more races (US Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics). The federal government estimates Connecticut's economy shrunk by nearly one-third in the first two quarters of 2020 (Bureau of Economic Analysis, US Department of Commerce).

Predictably, enrollment in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) increased in Hartford, and first time visits to food pantries rose. Hartford SNAP participants received nearly \$8 million in benefits in November, up about 25% from February (CT Department of Social Services, data on request). At the same time, food distributors worked with food banks and food pantries to redirect surplus food (from restaurants, office cafeterias, and other sources shut down or slowed down by the pandemic). Foodshare reports distributing nearly 750,000 pounds of food through their mobile sites; their partner pantries distributed more than three million pounds of food; and at the

Rentschler Field distribution, they have served more than 218,000 families – many of them were first time clients (Foodshare, data on request). Food pantry programs such as the MANNA Community Pantry managed by Hands on Hartford received hundreds of pounds of locally grown produce from Knox and school gardens maintained by Val Bryan and others while schools remained closed. Hartford Public Schools has distributed more than two million meals, quickly adapting to offer takeaway meals at 32 different sites (Hartford Public Schools, data on request).



*Cars lined up for Foodshare distribution at Rentschler Field in East Hartford.*  
Photo: WFSB. [https://www.wfsb.com/news/foodshare-to-continue-handing-out-food-at-rentschler-field-through-august/article\\_a8358180-d0b8-11ea-a49d-fb42608e70dc.html](https://www.wfsb.com/news/foodshare-to-continue-handing-out-food-at-rentschler-field-through-august/article_a8358180-d0b8-11ea-a49d-fb42608e70dc.html)



*Renicha Roman with Hartford Public Schools Food and Child Nutrition Services distributes milk and other products to Hartford families at Wish School.*

Furthermore, Hartford Public Schools purchased over 16 tons of fresh, local produce to give to families alongside meal distribution: the local food included milk from Connecticut dairy farms and produce from Knox Incubator Farmers and the Keney Park Sustainability Project (Hartford Public Schools, data on request).

In addition to the less surprising impacts on employment and food security, the pandemic has had unexpected effects on the local food system. At home and in community gardens, more people are growing their own food: Knox worked with more than 300 community gardeners this year. Community gardens offered safe outdoor space for socializing as neighbors grew food to eat at home and share

with others. Consumer habits showed that people took up new interests in cooking and growing food: many shoppers encountered shortages of flour and yeast as more people baked bread at home; gardeners similarly encountered seed and garden supply shortages as more people tried out gardening for the first time. Farmers' markets across the state saw more customers than in previous years, according to a forthcoming survey from the Connecticut Food System Alliance. This may be because farmers' markets offer open air spaces where it is easier to social distance. Farmers and farmer advocates also worked to increase the visibility of farmers' markets and farmstands in order to sell off product that had been destined for restaurants. Farmers' markets help make communities more resilient against the supply chain disruptions that occurred nationwide.

### *Lessons Emerging from COVID-19*

In all areas of policy, we owe it to more than 400,000 and counting Americans who have died in this pandemic to learn what we can and make the world a better place. The food supply chain in particular exposed its weak points, and longstanding racial and wealth inequality became impossible to ignore as their symptoms exacerbated. The following lessons should inform policy to recover from the pandemic and prevent/prepare for future similar disruptions, whether they are public health crises, disasters related to climate change and extreme weather, or social and political unrest.

- **Adaptability:** While some entities were able to move quickly in response to challenges brought on by the pandemic, others stalled. Regardless, the pandemic has underscored the need for adaptability in government programs, farms, restaurants, grocery stores, and other parts of the food system. For example, at advocates' behest, the USDA offered waivers for various nutrition programs to relax restrictions, reaching more clients. Food distributors scrambled to repackage products for individual and family consumption, some more smoothly than others. Farmers' markets and even individual farms developed online ordering systems. Restaurants created weekly grocery boxes to sell uncooked food, and lobbied the state to be able to include alcohol in food delivery. Governments tested new

approaches such as direct cash relief with minimal means testing. Being able to innovate (and quickly implement those innovations) is vital.

- **Community Power:** Developing mutual aid networks to redistribute money and food, organizing massive (yet socially distant) protests for racial justice, and turning out record voting numbers are just a few of the ways that communities demonstrated power this year. Policy should be driven by residents' concerns and ideas.
- **Equity:** COVID-19, like any crisis, has impacted people of color and low income people more than white people and high income people. Community demand for change was great in spite of and because of the pandemic. Policy should address the roots of racism and wealth inequality; poor areas, rural areas, and more Black, Indigenous, and Latino areas will all need greater resources to recover from the pandemic. Equality has never been an appropriate standard for systems change.
- **Resilience:** The pandemic exposed and exacerbated many issues with our existing systems, laws, and policies. "Rebuilding" after COVID-19 should seek to build back better systems instead of reinstating inadequate, unsustainable, and unjust ones. Whatever the next disruption is, we cannot repeat the devastating impact of COVID-19 due to lack of preparedness or lack of political will.
- **Communication:** Communication between government agencies, different levels of government, community agencies, and communication with the public have been vital during the pandemic. Community agencies have kept one another informed about closures and changes; state agencies sought clear guidance from federal counterparts; the public needs to stay informed about health and safety recommendations. New networks were created in response to the pandemic to de-silo different sectors and agencies to coordinate responses.
- **Diversification:** Businesses, particularly farms, that already had different streams of income or were quickly able to offer different products or services fared better. Diversified farms can be more economically sound as well as environmentally sound.
- **Decentralization:** Groups distributing food aid and grocery stores restocking quickly emptying shelves both faced major bottlenecks. If there were more small-scale distributors and processors throughout Connecticut, local supply chains would flow with less disruption.
- **Aid:** The federal government, intentionally or not, has experimented with public assistance programs during the pandemic; the results of these experiments should inform permanent policy change. These changes included relaxing requirements, reducing paperwork, increasing benefit amounts, and even disbursing direct cash relief with minimal eligibility requirements and means testing. Changes to these programs that increase food security should become permanent. Typically, programs with minimal eligibility requirements and little to no means testing have lower administrative costs than more restrictive counterparts. This country's experience with stimulus checks should inform public assistance programs.

## ***Food Policy Recommendations***

The Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy presents three policy areas informed by these lessons:

- **Invest in restoring and assisting food businesses, and create new, higher paying jobs.**
- **Address immediate food insecurity through nutrition programs and community programs.**
- **Develop a plan to increase food grown and processed in Hartford.**

The responsibility for these recommendations lies with everyone: City government, state government, federal government, community agencies, private foundations, businesses, consumers, and volunteers all have a role to play. Most of the recommendations have a major fiscal impact; they require shifts in city, state, and federal budgets. Budgets and tax structures must reflect a commitment to community and individual well-being. Unprecedented damage and disruption caused by the pandemic and by climate change must be answered by bold, innovative policy and action by governments, businesses, nonprofits, and individual people.

*Policy Recommendation: Invest in restoring and assisting food businesses, and create new, higher paying jobs.*

**WHAT?** Numerous food businesses have been lost to or significantly damaged by the pandemic. Many Hartford residents, primarily people of color, lost their jobs due to the pandemic. The City must invest in restoring and assisting food businesses while creating new, higher paying jobs.

**WHY?** Food businesses are an integral part of Hartford's economic, social, and cultural recovery. As they are revived, they can create living wage jobs. Better paying jobs will reduce the high turnover and onboarding time in food service; it will also reduce the need for social assistance and accurately reflects the costs of living while doing vital work. Many of the "essential workers" who cannot work from home and instead risk infection by growing and selling food are paid minimum or below-living wage; living wage should be a policy priority.

**HOW?** Fund small business loans especially for food businesses – prioritize businesses that hire above minimum wage, support opportunities for new food entrepreneurs – particularly women and people of color, create educational opportunities in farming and the culinary arts that end in employment opportunities, implement a living wage, pass equal pay legislation, revitalize the Hartford Regional Market.

The Commission will work with Hartford's delegation at the Connecticut General Assembly to advocate for these programs and policy changes. The City of Hartford can contribute to this rebuilding by offering outreach about relief programs and in its advocacy at the state legislature and in Congress, but this priority should also be reflected in the City budget.

**Living wage** legislation must be prioritized both to help people recover from the pandemic and to correct long-term structural failures of the market to fully support workers. In the metro Hartford area (Hartford, West Hartford, and East Hartford), the living wage is estimated at \$28.54 per hour for one full time working parent with one child or \$15.64 for a household of two full time working adults and one child (MIT Living Wage Calculator). Any wage increases implemented during the pandemic must continue after the pandemic.

The **Hartford Regional Market** is the largest food distribution center between New York and Boston; it has the potential to be a community and commerce hub similar to the Central New York Regional Market in Syracuse, NY and Reading Terminal Market in Philadelphia, PA. The Commission applauds the efforts thus far of the Capital Region Development Authority (CRDA) to improve the market. Even changes to the farmers' market schedule



(Saturdays from 6 am to 9 am), could be made to increase visitors to the market. CRDA should continue to implement the recommendations of the 2018 market study; opportunities for value-added processing, community gardens and community gatherings, and a winter market should be prioritized (Goman + York Advisory Services, 2018).

**Small business loans** such as the Paycheck Protection Program, Bridge Loans, Debt Relief, and Economic Injury Disaster Loans offered by the US Small Business Administration are a vital part of economic recovery. The City and state government can offer additional support by offering application assistance and raising awareness about the programs, particularly in immigrant communities. The City can also help Hartford food businesses connect with private relief efforts.

*Policy Recommendation: Address immediate food insecurity through nutrition programs and community programs.*

**WHAT?** Food pantries, food banks, soup kitchens, school meal programs, mutual aid and community feeding efforts, and federal nutrition programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Special Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) create a broad patchwork of direct and indirect food aid from private and public sources. Organizations like Foodshare deployed massive new programs, like their distribution at Rentschler Field several days a week for the past several months. Although the goal should be to eliminate the need for emergency feeding programs, continued support for and coordination of nutrition and community programs is necessary.

**WHY?** Food is a basic human right. Food insecurity has long-term physical and mental health effects. SNAP benefits are calculated based on a draconian “adequate” diet amounting to about \$1.40 per meal (before the pandemic) which relies on often time-consuming scratch cooking that is not always feasible for working families (Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, 7 November 2019).

**HOW?** Increase maximum benefits in programs like SNAP; implement SNAP and WIC matching programs at farmers’ markets; increase local food purchasing in schools; coordinate distribution of food donations to food banks and food pantries; reduce barriers to nutrition programs.

The Commission applauds Congress for **increasing SNAP benefits** by 15% as part of a recent COVID-19 relief package, amounting to roughly an additional \$30 per month for an average family (Marketplace, 5 January 2021). These temporary increases should continue after the pandemic, because benefits were inadequate prior to the pandemic. SNAP recipients are more likely to participate in the local food economy when farmers’ markets accept, and especially double or increase, SNAP benefits. The City of Hartford should join the Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy and other advocates across the state to advocate for a **state-funded fruit and vegetable incentive program**, such as the Massachusetts Healthy Incentive Program (MA HIP) which is funded by state, federal, and private funding. Since it was created in 2017, MA HIP has connected 85,000 families to more than 200 farms, exchanging \$19.5 million in healthy, fresh fruits and vegetables (Massachusetts Food System Collaborative). Programs like this have health benefits for SNAP recipients, and economic benefits for local farmers.

“**Local food**” was once the majority of our diets, for the majority of history. In recent decades, it has developed a reputation as an expensive luxury, and in Connecticut it is a small portion of our diet – to the detriment of consumers and producers alike. This reputation, as well as the reality is changing, since local food has even made its way into food pantries and onto school lunch trays. The City and Hartford Public Schools should work to reach the Connecticut **Farm to School** Collaborative’s goal of 25% of school food being locally produced by

2032 (Connecticut Farm to School, 2019). The Commission will work with the Collaborative on the development of its Farm to School Action Plan.

**Food banks and pantries** have made great strides to streamline and coordinate varying schedules across the state. Food pantries should require minimal paperwork, which can be a deterrent, especially if someone is undocumented. State and city government, as well as community agencies, can work with and encourage new partnerships between food pantries/banks and new sources of food from individual farmers to wholesalers.

*Policy Recommendation: Develop a plan to increase food grown and processed in Hartford.*

**WHAT?** Urban farms, community gardens, school gardens, hydroponics and aquaponics, and “edible landscapes” enrich cities with fresh food, jobs, education, youth engagement, volunteer opportunities, increased green space, and more. Value-added food processing similarly enhances the economy and literal and figurative “flavor” of a city.

**WHY?** Increasing the amount of food grown and produced in Hartford will increase access to fresh, local food and offer and increase the aforementioned opportunities. Having short, local food supply chains will make Hartford less susceptible to national and global supply chain disruptions.

**HOW?** Work with community gardeners; urban farmers; school garden teachers, volunteers, and students; value-added food processors; consumers; and relevant city agencies to develop targets for food production and processing; identify sites throughout the city for growing and processing food; and identify best practices for encouraging food production and processing.

The City of Bridgeport created an **Urban Agriculture Master Plan**, a “community-driven, collective vision” for growing food in the city based on an assessment of the city’s food environment (Green Village Initiative). Hartford took a revolutionary step in support of urban agriculture by permitting it in most city zones in 2015; we can build off this progress by developing recommendations and production targets for food production in the city.

The **Swift Factory** in Hartford’s North End is now home to several value-added food companies, many of which are owned by women and/or people of color. The City can encourage more development that centers Hartford residents and their entrepreneurial skills to produce sauces, snacks, preserves, and other foods for sale throughout the state.



*Connecticut grown tomatoes and peaches at a Hartford farmers' market.*

## ***Proposed Structural Changes to the Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy***

The Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy is one of the oldest food policy councils in the country, and carries a legacy of inter-agency, cross-sector collaboration to end food insecurity. The Commission is submitting proposed changes to the founding ordinance in order to update its mission and goals, as well as expand the Commission from 15 to up to 21 commissioners, introduce term limits, and require that 2/3rds of commissioners are Hartford residents. An excerpt about the Commission's new goals is below:

Access to nutritious, culturally relevant, sustainably produced food is a significant factor in health, happiness, cultural celebration, and economic opportunities. Food justice and climate resilience inform the goals of the food policy advisory commission, which are as follows:

- (1) To provide a platform for Hartford residents to have voice and control over the food system of Hartford;
- (2) To advocate for food security for all residents;
- (3) To advocate for access to nutritious and culturally relevant food regardless of economic status, location or other factors beyond a resident's control;
- (4) To advocate for more local production of food including farming, community and school gardens, and food businesses; and
- (5) To advocate for sustainable practices in food retail and distribution, agriculture, and waste management.

These changes reflect the Commission's more expansive approach to food policy, acknowledging the importance of sustainability and of growing food in Hartford. The Commission will work with the Mayor and City Council to update the ordinance.

## ***Advancing Food Policy During the 2021 Connecticut Legislative Session***

The Commission is dedicated to advocating for healthy, sustainable food policy at the city and state level, and will work to promote food policy during the 2021 Connecticut Legislative Session. This strategy will include:

- Working with other city commissions and local partners to host trainings about legislative advocacy
- Tracking bills introduced that are related to food and farms
- Working with the Mayor's office to create shared policy agendas
- Advising the City on policy positions at the state and federal level
- Encouraging constituents to testify on bills and write to their legislators
- Coordinating with other city agencies to advocate at the state and federal level
- Supporting bills using public testimony, letters to Hartford legislators, and media if appropriate
- Coordinating with other food policy councils in the state to identify shared policy goals
- Identifying a policy sub-committee of the Commission to work on the items described above

## Conclusions



*Hartford-grown corn from Keney Park Sustainability Project.*

The Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy uses a combination of public awareness, advising city officials, convening local stakeholders, and monitoring state and federal policy change in order to ensure greater food access in Hartford. This year, more than ever, coordination among government and community agencies is vital. The policy recommendations outlined above are the result of this year's collaborations with numerous residents and community organizations. The Commission continues to advocate as it always has for a Hartford with bountiful, affordable, fresh food for all residents; food and farming education for all Hartford residents; and reduced food waste and more sustainable food and farming practices. The pandemic has further emphasized the need for a just, equitable, sustainable food system. Moderate policy change cannot fully address the drastic effects of the pandemic or climate change.

Hartford is a small 17-square mile city of 122,000 people; we must work with others throughout the state for higher impact. To that end, the Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy is working closely with efforts to develop a

statewide food action plan facilitated by the Connecticut Food System Alliance. This plan will include a statewide vision for food access and food grown in Connecticut and represents a public-private partnership to reduce hunger and enhance sustainability in our state. This plan will center food justice, meaning that the people most likely to be harmed by our current food and farm system (particularly people of color) are empowered to shape how we grow, buy, and eat food in Connecticut. It will also emphasize climate resilience, to ensure that Connecticut's food system can withstand changes and disruptions in the national and global food supply chains.

If you would like to be involved with the Commission's efforts to reduce hunger and promote sustainability, please contact [Meg@HartfordFood.org](mailto:Meg@HartfordFood.org).

## ***References and Additional Resources***

Boehm, Rebecca; Martin, Jiff; Foster, Jaime; Lopez, Rigoberto. *Food Insecurity and Obesity Incidence Across Connecticut*. University of Connecticut Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, Zwick Center for Food and Resource Policy, Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity, Department of Extension. January 2019. [http://uconnruddcenter.org/files/Food%20Security%20Report\\_54\(1\).pdf](http://uconnruddcenter.org/files/Food%20Security%20Report_54(1).pdf)

Center for Budget and Policy Priorities. *Chart Book: SNAP Helps Struggling Families Put Food on the Table*. 7 November 2019. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/chart-book-snap-helps-struggling-families-put-food-on-the-table>

CT Data Collaborative. *Unemployment in Connecticut During COVID-19 Crisis*. 2020. <https://www.ctdata.org/covid19-unemployment>

CT Department of Labor. *Current Labor Force Data for Connecticut Towns (LAUS) – State of Connecticut: November*. Last retrieved 8 January 2021. <https://www1.ctdol.state.ct.us/lmi/LAUS/lmi123.asp>

CT Department of Public Health via CT Data. *COVID-19 Tests, Cases, and Deaths (By Town)*. Last retrieved 22 January 2021. <https://data.ct.gov/Health-and-Human-Services/COVID-19-Tests-Cases-and-Deaths-By-Town-/28fr-ignx>

Connecticut Farm to School Collaborative. *Farm to School in Action*. 2019. <https://www.ctfarmtoschool.org/ct-fts-action-plan>

Green Village Initiative. *Urban Agriculture Master Plan for the City of Bridgeport*. 2019. <https://www.gogvi.org/urban-agriculture-master-plan>

Goman + York Advisory Services. *Connecticut Regional Market Executive Summary*. October 2018. <https://crdact.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Connecticut-Regional-Market-Board-Summary.pdf>

Massachusetts Food System Collaborative. *Massachusetts Healthy Incentives Program (HIP)*. <https://mafoodsystem.org/media/projects/pdfs/HIPfactsheet.pdf>

Massachusetts Institute of Technology. *Living Wage Calculator*. 2021. <https://livingwage.mit.edu/metros/25540>

US Census Bureau. *American Communities Survey, 2019 5-year estimates*.

\* Compare the City of Hartford to Hartford County at this link:

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/hartfordcountyconnecticut,hartfordtownhartfordcountycconnecticut/PST045219>

US Census Bureau and US Bureau of Labor Statistics. *Current Population Survey*. 2020. Browse and download datasets here: <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/data/tables.html>

\* Data visualizations and analysis available here:

Groeger, Lena. *What Coronavirus Job Losses Reveal About Racism in America*. Pro Publica. 20 July 2020.  
<https://projects.propublica.org/coronavirus-unemployment/>

US Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis. *Gross Domestic Product by State, 2nd Quarter 2020: Decreases in All States and the District of Columbia in the Second Quarter*. 2 October 2020.  
[https://www.bea.gov/sites/default/files/2020-10/qgdpstate1020\\_0.pdf](https://www.bea.gov/sites/default/files/2020-10/qgdpstate1020_0.pdf)

Ward, Rachel and Fuller, Hannah. Farmers Market Coalition. *Farmers Markets as Part of Disaster Resilience*. 28 October 2020. <https://farmersmarketcoalition.org/farmers-markets-as-part-of-disaster-resilience/>

World Health Organization, *WHO Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Dashboard*. Last retrieved 17 December 2020.  
<https://covid19.who.int/>

### ***Acknowledgements***

The Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy would like to thank the following individuals for their services to the Commission and their contributions to this report:

Joey Abad, Liany Arroyo, Joe Barber, Julie Bergeron, Angela Bermudez-Millan, Lori DiPietro, Gilma Galdamez, Alice Gold, Chris Goodwin, David Grant, Chavon Hamilton, Meg Hourigan, Amber Hromi-Fiedler, Aedra Jones, Shubhada Kambli, Abbie Kelly, Sam King, Nickolle Knowles, Nicole Lawton, Kathleen Maldonado, Gina Muslim, Jim Palma, Bill Seedman, Jaime Smith, Shana Smith, Kate Quigley, Herb Virgo, Gillian Walcott, Erin Windham, and Grace Yi.

The Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy would like to thank the following organizations for their services to the Commission and their contributions to this report:

Bridgeport Food Policy Council, Center for Latino Progress, Community Solutions, Connecticut Department of Social Services, FoodCorps, Foodshare, Forge City Works, Green Village Initiative, Hispanic Health Council, Hands on Hartford, Hartford Food System, the City of Hartford Planning and Zoning Commission, the City of Hartford Office of the Mayor, the Hartford Department of Health and Human Services, the Hartford Public Library, Hartford Public Schools Food and Child Nutrition Services, the Hartford School Garden Council, Keney Park Sustainability Project, KNOX, Lawson Valentine Foundation, the Office of the Mayor of Hartford, Trinity College, United Way, University of Connecticut, and Urban Alliance.

*We honor the memory of Sebastian Kolodziej, chef at House of Bread, for his many years directly fighting hunger.*

*We honor the memory of Joanne Bauer, a fierce advocate of social justice and sustainability.*

*We honor the victims of the coronavirus pandemic through advocacy.*





City of Hartford  
Advisory Commission on Food Policy  
Annual Report and Recommendations  
2020  
Prepared for the City of Hartford by:

**HARTFORD**   
**FOOD SYSTEM**

Hartford Food System  
190 Wethersfield Ave.  
Hartford, CT 06114